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**THE PRINCESS MATHILDE  
BONAPARTE**

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Princess Mathilde.  
*(From the bust by Carpeaux.)*

THE  
PRINCESS MATHILDE  
BONAPARTE

BY

PHILIP W. SERGEANT

AUTHOR OF "THE LAST EMPRESS OF THE FRENCH," "MRS. JORDAN,  
CHILD OF NATURE," ETC. ETC.

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# THE PRINCESS MATHILDE BONAPARTE

## CHAPTER I

### A BEAUTIFUL PRINCESS

MATHILDE - LŒTITIA - WILHELMINE BONAPARTE was undoubtedly one of those women who owe much to their possession of personal beauty. It will be abundantly evident in the course of this book that she had many other gifts for which to thank Nature—more fortunate in this respect than her aunt Pauline, "*la belle des belles*," who had little else than loveliness to commend her. But without her looks, we may well imagine, the other gifts of the Princess Mathilde would have failed to win for her the place which she occupies in nineteenth-century French history. By their fascination she turned her friends into adorers and made of her home a Court which revolutions were powerless to destroy. No apology, therefore, is needful if we begin her story with a few of the tributes paid to her beauty by those who had the pleasure of gazing on it in its perfection.

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The Princess has no more enthusiastic admirer than Arsène Houssaye, director of the Théâtre Français and author of many entertaining works. "*Grand air de princesse, tête héraldique et olympienne portant bien sa couronne*"—such is the exclamation with which he begins his description of her in *Les Confessions*. "A true princess must be beautiful," he says, "and the Princess Mathilde is beautiful with all the beauties.

"She has sovereign beauty and the beauty of sovereigns, strength and sweetness, line and expression, style and charm, a kind heart for all the world, and banter for the fools. Here is the face of Napoleon, from the slope of the forehead to the despotic chin; fine eyes, both proud and sweet; a nose which is Italian, with mobile nostrils, rather than Greek with the immobility of marble; a charming mouth, showing kindness in the upper lip, imperiousness in the lower. That art which she worships has given a supreme touch of enlightenment to this countenance, in which the prevailing characteristic is an intelligence that is lofty, masterful, impulsive. And how proud is that carriage, which always brings to mind the saying of a certain highly placed lady of middle-class extraction: 'You can easily see that she was born to it.'"

Better known, probably, is the tribute of Sainte-Beuve, generally called "The Portrait

of the Princess." This was published first in 1862, to accompany a photograph of her in a series of portraits and biographies of the Bonaparte family, and was included later in the eleventh volume of the *Causeries du Lundi*.

"She has a high and noble forehead, made for the diadem. Her light golden hair leaves uncovered on each side her broad, pure temples, and sweeps round to join again in wavy masses on the full, finely shaped neck. There is no lack of decision in the firmly chiselled features. A chance mole or two shows that Nature had no intention that the classic purity of line which is hers should be confused with any other's. The well-set eyes, impressive rather than large, of a clear brown hue, gleam with the affection or the thought of the moment, and are not apt to feign or conceal. Their glance is quick and piercing; now and then they turn full toward you, not so much to fathom your thought as to convey their own. The whole physiognomy indicates nobility, dignity, and, as soon as it lights up, the union of grace and power, the gladness which springs from a healthy nature, frankness, and goodness, at times also an ardent spirit. In a moment of just anger, the cheek flames. The admirably poised head rises from a dazzling and magnificent bust, and is joined to shoulders of statuesque smoothness and whiteness. The hands have no equal in the

#### 4 THE PRINCESS MATHILDE BONAPARTE

world—the hands of the Bonaparte family. The body is of medium stature, but is made to look tall by its suppleness and harmony of proportion. The carriage is instinct with race, and gives an undefinable impression of sovereignty and full-blooded womanhood."

Jules de Goncourt scatters through his section of the *Journal*, in which he and his brother with such exquisite industry recorded the life and characters of the society in which they moved, many praises of the Princess Mathilde's looks, and particularly her smile—"a charming smile, a lovable human smile, full of many things," "the sweetest smile in the world, that rich smile of charming Italian mouths."

It would be easy to collect the homages of other literary men, and indeed we shall hear some of them later on. But perhaps, for the moment, we have had enough. One tribute from a woman may be added, which is the more valuable, seeing that it comes from the pen of the Princess Caroline Murat, in whose mouth compliments are few.<sup>1</sup> Writing of her kinswoman at the age of about twenty-nine, she says: "She must have been uncommonly beautiful in her young womanhood; she was still very handsome when I knew her first, and she always remained a woman of distinguished presence."

<sup>1</sup> See p. 64.

All observers noticed that the Princess, like her brother Prince Napoleon, far more resembled the great Emperor than their own father in features and build—a resemblance of which she was proud, for she had an intense admiration of her uncle's looks, and once so severely rated a distinguished old scientist for belittling them that she felt sorry for her harsh speech afterwards. Jerome Bonaparte was described by the Duchesse d' Abrantès—who, however, was no friend of his, and was little inclined to do him even justice—as “the least well-looking of all his family.” She allows him a good figure. According to less prejudiced critics, he was in youth small, spare, and graceful, dark-haired and dark-eyed. His dandyism, of a long-past era, renders his early portraits curious rather than attractive to modern eyes. In the later representations of him he is not altogether unpleasing, but he in no way suggests either his daughter or his son. The mother, on the other hand, transmitted many of her physical traits to the children, especially the daughter. Catherine of Würtemberg inherited from her father, mockingly called “the greatest king in Europe,” an excessive stoutness. She was small in stature, but carried herself very upright, and her head was well poised on a short neck. Her hair was fair, her eyes blue, and her complexion very fresh. The stoutness, somewhat modified, the good carriage,

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and the fair hair all descended to the Princess Mathilde. So too did the fresh colour, which, in daughter as in mother, at times of excitement turned to a deep crimson which was not altogether becoming.

It is reported that the Princess Mathilde once boasted that she had as a child an extraordinary complexion. “I remember that in Switzerland, when I was fourteen, they put a Bengal roseleaf against my cheek and could not tell the difference.” This has been taken by some critic of the Princess as a proof of vanity. Seeing who was her father, we should expect to find her vain. But in simple justice it must be said that there are singularly few indications of such a trait in her character. The roseleaf story, indeed, appears an isolated instance. Of course she liked flattery, just as others who are not beautiful, nor princesses, nor even women, like it; and she received much, from the most literary of her acquaintances. Once she went to a fancy-dress ball at the house of the magnificent Morny, dressed in a costume of rags designed for her by her friend and painting-master, Eugène Giraud, and her face hidden by an ugly mask. She told Jules de Goncourt afterwards, “with charming effusion,” of the pleasure which she had experienced in finding men rude to her, to whom they were usually so much the reverse. This does not suggest that she put an undue value on the compliments which were

her general portion. If we take a general view, based upon the testimony of witnesses extremely various in their outlook on life, we see a picture of a woman singularly unspoilt by the fact that she was beautiful.

## CHAPTER II

### HER PARENTS

IN the parentage of the Princess Mathilde there is not much that would lead us to expect so fine a product as she undoubtedly was. Her father, Jerome Bonaparte, was remarkable for nothing so much as his lack of ballast. Napoleon, in one of his milder reproaches against his brother, describes him as “painfully young” (*furieusement jeune*). Jerome was then only twenty-five, but he remained youthful for another fifty years. As a rake, a fop, and a spendthrift he certainly made his mark. Under the Second Empire a band of adulators professed to find in him statesmanship, military capacity, and other talents to which it is impossible to admit his claims. Since then much has been published in disparagement of him; and in the event of another Bonapartist restoration—the heir, it will be remembered, is his grandson Victor, to whom a son was born at the beginning of this present year—the Court historians would find ample scope for the white-



JEROME BONAPARTE.



wash brush. The sincerest tribute to him was paid by his second wife, Mathilde's mother, and the great puzzle is that this was at once a tribute and unquestionably sincere.<sup>1</sup>

The virtues of Catherine of Würtemberg, the princess forced by the policies of Napoleon and of her autocratic father to marry the young *roué* of the Bonaparte family, are well known to every one who has given attention to the most thoroughly discussed of all historical periods. It is unnecessary, therefore, to repeat the praises which have been showered upon her by her contemporaries and by those who came after. It may be admitted that her virtues were of the domestic order, that she exhibited them in her relations with her father, brothers, husband, children, her connections by blood or by marriage, her dependents, and that she did not win the fame that was hers by a striking display of what may be called public virtues. She was too simple to be great, but she was emphatically a good woman. What then attracted her so dearly in Jerome, whose morals were grievously damaged before he married her and who betrayed her constantly during the seven years of their life in Westphalia? She came to him with dread—and surely with some disdain, for she was the daughter of a king, the grandniece of a king, and the cousin of an

<sup>1</sup> I have myself attempted, in *The Burlesque Napoleon* (1905), the difficult task of drawing an impartial portrait of Jerome.

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emperor, all living at the time of her wedding.<sup>1</sup> She was brought up at a narrow German Court, first with her grandparents and then with her stepmother, the Princess Royal of England. At the age of twenty-four she was carried off to Paris, united to Jerome, and sent with him to the newly created kingdom of Westphalia. Here her husband indulged, far beyond the capacity of the Civil List allowed him by Napoleon, his insatiable thirst for frivolity and expenditure. He took as his motto a sentence which he was fond of repeating to his friends and parasites as they went to bed at the end of each squandered day: “*Loustic* to-day, *loustic* to-morrow, *loustic* always”—*loustic* being his attempt to pronounce the German *lustig*, joyful. He surrounded himself and his wife with men of no brains and women of no morals, his amours being known to all in Cassel and reported with minute care to Napoleon by his agents. Yet somehow Catherine was happy. With her stoutness must have gone a blessed placidity of disposition that in a less lovable person might be put down to stupidity. There is no hint of any scene made by her as the injured wife. Jerome to her was familiarly “*Fifi*”; she was his “little *Trinette*.” His manners towards her were always kind and

<sup>1</sup> Her mother, Charlotte, was daughter of Charles, Duke of Brunswick, and Augusta, sister of George III. Her father's sister, Sophia of Würtemberg, married Paul of Russia and by him was mother of the Tsar Alexander I.

polished, and there was a place for her at every entertainment of the giddy Court. How she contrived to come through the ordeal innocent as well as contented is a secret of which the explanation lies deep down in her character. It is certain that the breath of scandal left her untouched.

The extent of "Trinette's" affection for her "Fifi" was splendidly proved when the disaster of the Empire's fall arrived. While Jerome escorted his sister-in-law Marie-Louise to Orleans, Catherine made an attempt to secure a refuge for him and herself somewhere outside France. At the head of the Würtemberg contingent in the Allies' army occupying Paris in 1814 was her brother William, the Crown Prince. She wrote to him asking for an interview, but he—a favoured guest at the Court of Cassel a few years before—brutally refused to see her. She applied next to Count Wintzingerode, formerly a Westphalian subject and now Würtemberg's Minister in Paris. He offered a home to her at her father's capital on condition that she abandoned Jerome. Thereon Catherine indignantly wrote to her father, refusing to believe that this suggestion was his (though it was) or to consider the idea of a separation from Jerome, the cause of her happiness for the past seven years.

Frederick of Würtemberg was not melted by this, nor by a second letter from his daughter,

## 12 THE PRINCESS MATHILDE BONAPARTE

who now turned for aid from her own country to Russia. The Tsar Alexander, we have seen, was her first cousin; and he was both gallant towards ladies and a good relative. He could not do much for his cousin at the moment, but at least he secured passports for her and Jerome, while he offered them a refuge in Russia. Neither wife nor husband, however, could entirely give up hope of wringing some concession out of the Allies, and after a brief wandering they obtained Austria's permission to settle down at Trieste. Here on August 24 Catherine gave birth to her first child, Jerome-Napoleon-Charles. She continued to resist her father's command to leave her husband, and wrote declaring herself "the happiest woman that could be."

1815 brought further trials. Jerome joined his brother and fought under him at Waterloo, with the only credit which ever fell to his lot in war by land. In his absence the Austrian police descended on Catherine and her child at Trieste, and removed them to Grätz. Peremptory orders reached her from King Frederick to come to Würtemberg at once unless she wished to be taken thither by force. She yielded, and in the château of Göppingen she awaited her husband's arrival. For some reason Jerome was treated with less severity by his father-in-law after Waterloo than before. It was intimated to him that he might live with

Catherine in Würtemberg on giving an oath not to leave again without Frederick's permission. Escaping from France, with the connivance of Fouché, now the Royalist Minister of Police, he made his way to Göppingen. But, if no longer proscribed, Jerome did not find himself treated as a friend in Würtemberg. With his family he was removed to the fortress of Ellwangen and kept a close prisoner for a year. He was compelled to realise what property remained to him and Catherine, and to invest the proceeds in Würtemberg, to be administered by agents of his father-in-law. At last Catherine prevailed upon her brother, the Crown Prince, to intercede with the King on their behalf; and Frederick, shortly before his death, consented to set them at liberty. Under the title of the Prince and Princess of Montfort, which was bestowed upon them as a parting gift, they removed to Bavarian territory, to await from Austria the reply to their request to be allowed to settle there again.

The Emperor Francis agreed that they should live in his dominions. But they were regarded with suspicion still, and when, after several changes of abode, they had wrested a reluctant consent to their removal to Trieste on account of the poor health of Catherine and her son, they were put under strict police surveillance. Jerome, in December 1819, bought what his

## 14 THE PRINCESS MATHILDE BONAPARTE

wife describes as a superb house at Trieste, with a view over the whole Gulf and lying amid vineyards like those of the beautiful plains about Naples. He resisted the strong pressure of the Austrian Government to make him leave Trieste again, and could plead that Catherine was now expecting a second child. He gained his end, and so it came about that it was at the Villa Montfort, Trieste, on May 27, 1820, the subject of this biography was born.

The death of Napoleon in the following year gave Jerome the hope that he would now be allowed to leave Trieste, where he was virtually a prisoner. His mother was urging him to come to her in Rome. The Court of Vienna, however, refused him permission to go even for a fortnight, under the guard of an Austrian officer, until seven months after Napoleon's death, when the Tsar's assistance procured him this concession. On his return he begged to be allowed to transfer his family to Rome, but here he met with a positive refusal. Louis XVIII. would not entertain such an idea, and Austria would not act against the wishes of the French Government. The Tsar at once came to the rescue ; and finally, at the Congress of Verona, the Powers put an end to the long captivity of Jerome and Catherine, the majority being persuaded that the Bonapartes counted for nothing in the future.

The ex-queen bore her third child, Napoleon-Joseph-Charles, the "Prince Napoleon" of history, on September 9, 1822. Two months later the removal to Rome was sanctioned. But delays were caused by Catherine's bodily weakness, the necessity of putting the family affairs in order, and the formalities insisted on by Vienna and the Vatican; and therefore it was not until the following March that good-bye was said to the Villa Montfort, and the father, mother, and three children started on the journey to Rome.

When we read the story of her parents' life during the eight years following 1814 it is easy to understand the affection which the Princess Mathilde always exhibited towards Russia. From her earliest years she was brought up in an atmosphere of gratitude to the Tsar Alexander. Jerome's many enemies would have us believe him incapable of gratitude, but no such accusation could be made against Catherine. Mathilde must often have heard from her mother's mouth how Alexander was their constant friend while almost the whole of Europe was bitterly hostile. Her own relations with his brother and successor were such as to bind her firmly to the Romanoffs. In any estimate of the characters of Alexander I. and Nicholas I., their chivalry to Catherine and Mathilde Bonaparte deserves full consideration.

## CHAPTER III

### ITALIAN DAYS

THE Princess Mathilde was still two months short of three years old when she was brought to Rome, already the home of her grandmother Lœtitia Bonaparte, her uncles Lucien and Louis, and her aunt Pauline, Princess Borghese. With Lucien's large family, of whom the eldest daughter Charlotte had already borne three girls to her husband, Prince Mario Gabrielli, and with Louis's two sons, there was a considerable colony of Bonapartes in Rome, of which the centre was Madame Lœtitia. The old lady, now seventy-three years of age, received the visits of her descendants every afternoon and was treated with great reverence. She lived quite retired from the outer world, cherishing the memory of Napoleon amid a sombre-clad household.<sup>1</sup> The other Bonapartes

<sup>1</sup> In a fragment of the Princess Mathilde's memoirs, which was read by Claudio Popelin to Edmund de Goncourt in 1874 (see below, p. 176), there was what Goncourt calls a striking portrait of Madame Lœtitia, "the inconsolable mother of the departed Cæsar, the ancestress of the race, with her waxen hands, her spinning-wheel ceaselessly humming through the silence of the vast palace."

did not feel constrained to wear the mourning so strictly as “the Corsican Niobe.” Louis, owing to his ill-health and his unfortunate relations with his wife, who visited Rome annually but kept away from him, was little seen in public. Lucien and Pauline, however, were prominent in Roman society—Lucien among the learned, and especially the archæologists, Pauline amongst the gay. Hortense, when, under her title of Duchess of Saint-Leu, she paid her yearly visits, was also a much courted hostess and a welcome guest.

As for Jerome, his natural frivolity inclined him to make the most of life anywhere. He had now, according to his biographer, du Casse, between seventy and eighty thousand francs—say £3,000—a year. The money was nearly all Catherine’s, her life-pension from Würtemberg and an annuity from the Tsar, but she put it at her husband’s disposal. Du Casse deplores the insufficiency of this income, which necessitated the straightest economy. We can well believe that Jerome found the sum insufficient, but not so readily that he consented to a policy of economy. A visitor to his palace, the Countess Potocka, describes him as living in splendid style, with a great staff of servants. Moreover, he had been in Rome but a little over two years when he bought for one hundred and fifty thousand francs a summer residence charmingly situated at Porto Fermo, near

Ancona. Although within the States of the Church, Porto Firmo was close to the Neapolitan frontier, and, harmless as Jerome was, the Bourbon Court of Naples hated all of the name of Bonaparte. In consequence a complaint was made to the Vatican; and in 1827 Jerome, protesting in vain, was forced to sell his house at a ruinous loss, leaving behind him at Porto Firmo the memory of a dashing cavalier on a white horse, and some scandal about a lady. After an interval to recoup himself, while lodging at the expense of friends, Jerome found another pleasant spot within the dominions of the Pope.<sup>1</sup> Here he was settled when the implication of the two sons of Louis and Hortense in the rising against the Papal authority brought about the expulsion of all the Bonapartes except Madame Mère. After eight years spent in Rome and

<sup>1</sup> In his *Napoléon et ses Détracteurs* Prince Napoleon gives a reminiscence of these early days which is interesting. "The Duke of Rovigo spent the summer of 1830 at my father's country-house of Colle Ameno, near Ancona. I was only eight then, but his long conversations have left a vivid recollection in my mind. It was he who, coming back from Ancona one day, told us of the revolution of 1830, and the restoration of the tricolour flag. I remember that on the news my mother, in the deepest enthusiasm, took my sister and myself in her arms and embraced us, crying, 'At last our exile is coming to an end, and you will be children of France!' Alas, she was mistaken, and we had to wait eighteen years longer to become French again."

One of the daughters of Rovigo, Marie Savary, was at a future date, under her married name of Madame de Serlay, to be a lady-in-waiting to the Princess Mathilde.

other parts of the States of the Church, Jerome and his family removed to Florence.

During these eight years we hear little of the children. The elder boy, Jerome junior, was sent to the Lazarist College at Sienna, while Mathilde and her little brother Napoleon remained in the care of their mother (a woman by no means deficient in culture, as some of her letters show) and a *gouvernante*. The latter, whom we first hear of with Catherine under the name of Madame de Rœding in the early days of exile, and shall meet again as the Baroness de Reding, companion to the Princess Mathilde, was of a good old German-Swiss family and was, apparently, well fitted for her post. A number of tutors were added later. The Princess speaks on one occasion<sup>1</sup> of her eighteen piano- and seven writing-masters—not, of course, all at the same time! Of one of the writing-masters she kept a vivid recollection; a man with a big round head covered with little white curls, who always came accompanied by a dog, and whose habit it was, after setting his pupil an exercise, to cut fresh quill-pens and keep substituting a new one between her fingers, throwing the old one on the floor. The teacher of English was a dapper little Irish priest, who for the children's amusement would leap over chairs, with his cassock held up by one hand in front of him.

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, September 29, 1882.

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Another of the Princess's reminiscences about her early bringing-up indicates that it was the mother who superintended the disciplining of the family. Strolling in her garden at Saint-Gratien once with Jules de Goncourt, the Princess talked to him freely about children. She lamented the way in which they forced one to come down to their level and stunted one's intelligence. (She had no child of her own, it must be remembered, though she showed a genuine affection for the little Prince Imperial.) "Besides," she added, "my ideas on education are philosophical. Perhaps that is the result of my own manner of education. My mother never spoilt me. My dear old Baroness de Reding grew indignant at something my mother said—'I would give all my children for Fifi's little finger!' "<sup>1</sup>

We may read into the Princess's remarks some criticism of her mother's excessive devotion to her father. She went on to say that she was happiest in the society of two old aunts. One of these was eighty, a tiny, shrivelled-up old woman, who had been ill for thirty years, lying upon a sofa which she vowed she would take with her to Paris, to her little niece's great amusement. She was a fierce Voltairean—"I've never seen such an atheist." The other aunt was older still, wore a nurse's round bonnet upon her head, was corsetless, and swore

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, October 1, 1866.



CATHERINE OF WÜRTTEMBERG.



like a trooper. The identity of these aunts is rather concealed by the age assigned to them. The former of them would appear to be Julie, the wife of Joseph Bonaparte, ex-King of Spain and known after 1815 as the Comte de Survilliers ; but she was born in 1771 and was not yet seventy-four years old when she died in April 1845.

On first coming to Florence, Jerome took the Serristori Palace as his residence. A little later he removed to the more magnificent Orlandini Palace, where he began to entertain in most lavish style. A French visitor to Italy, J. P. A. Méry, describes in his *Scènes de la Vie italienne* a concert given by the Prince of Montfort in 1834. The Prince's *soirées* were always delicious, he says, and perfectly arranged, the pleasure never being spoilt by overcrowding. Yet it was a common saying that "all Florence was at the Prince of Montfort's last night"; and not only all the Tuscan aristocracy, but also every stranger of note, especially if he or she were French, came to his receptions. On the night of the concert at which Méry was present the Palazzo Orlandini was a wonderful sight, with its lights and flowers, the jewels of its guests, the beautiful women, and the famous men who thronged the rooms. In the concert-saloon—decorated with pictures by Gros, David, Gérard, Giradet, and Vernet, and busts by Bosio, Canova, and Barto-

lini, all representing the Imperial family—celebrated musicians and the leading Florentine amateurs gave of their best. Jerome delighted Méry by talking to him of Waterloo and, with tears starting from his eyes, describing the great battle. Catherine was perhaps too ill to appear, for it was the young Princess Mathilde who received the ladies, sparkling like a diamond in their midst.

“She is entirely French, heart and soul,” exclaims the enthusiastic Méry. Thirty years later, at a dinner in the Rue de Courcelles, he was among the guests. Jules de Goncourt describes him, old, horribly ugly, coarse-featured, blear-eyed, rough-bearded, still singing the praises of the Princess Mathilde and recalling the day when first he looked upon her beauty, *la beauté divinement ingénue*, as she rode on horseback in the streets of Florence.

The splendours of the Palazzo Orlandini were not destined to last many years, for she upon whose life the means to keep them up depended was now failing fast. Soon after the removal of the family to Florence Catherine had the satisfaction of a complete reconciliation with her brother William. The King of Würtemberg came to Leghorn for sea-baths in 1832, and Jerome, Catherine, and their children met him there and softened his heart. When he left he took with him the younger Jerome, to train him for a military career in the Würtemberg army.

Catherine had little strength to do more for her family after this. In the early summer of 1835 her condition became so bad that Jerome took her, on the doctor's advice, to Lausanne. Their two younger children accompanied them, and for some months the family lived in a villa which had been lent by a friend. Catherine's dropsy, however, grew steadily worse, and the younger Jerome was summoned from Würtemberg. On November 29 the end was known to be at hand, though the sufferer was not yet aware of this. It is said that when Mathilde and her two brothers were brought to their mother's bedside and knelt at it, she asked in surprise why her blessing was being asked at this particular moment. It was well that she should bless them every night, answered her husband, since misfortune was always possible. She understood, gave them the blessing, and then, turning round, she said: "I see that death is coming; I do not fear it. I have always loved you best in the world, Jerome"—she lifted his hand to her lips—"I am ready. I wish I could have said farewell to you in France."

On Catherine's death Jerome temporarily broke up his household. He escorted Mathilde to Stuttgart, her uncle having invited her on a visit. The younger Jerome also went to Würtemberg to resume his military training. Napoleon was sent to Arenenberg, his aunt

Hortense's home by Lake Constance. Having disposed of them all, the ex-king retired to a small house at Quarto, outside Florence. His financial position was very bad, for with his wife's death the allowances from Würtemberg and Russia ceased, and he can have had but little left of his own money. He was glad, therefore, to accept an invitation to Arenenberg in the New Year, and he fetched Mathilde from Stuttgart to stay there also. The idea now occurred for the first time, it is said, to him and to Hortense, that they might make a match between Mathilde and Louis-Napoleon, the surviving son of Louis Bonaparte and Hortense. The two must certainly have made one another's acquaintance in Rome, and they had met more recently at Lausanne, whither Hortense had sent her son with messages during Catherine's last illness. Now twenty-eight years of age, Louis-Napoleon had become, by the death of the unhappy Duke of Reichstadt, heir to the Imperial throne. The match was thus good in Jerome's eyes, provided that the pretender did not throw away his chances by premature action. The proposed bridegroom was much attracted by his cousin, she was not displeased with him, and Louis Bonaparte's consent was ready, so that it only seemed to require the bride to grow a little older before the scheme could be realised. Unhappily for such an end, Louis-Napoleon's dreams of a speedy restoration

were now leading him on to the disaster of Strasburg. After accompanying Jerome and his daughter to Italy on the termination of their visit, he slipped away secretly to Baden to meet his adherents. Arrangements were made for the crossing of the frontier, and in October he left Arenenberg again to strike the blow. The result was that before the end of 1836 he was a captive in the hands of the Bourbons and was deported to the United States.

The letter is well known which Louis-Napoleon wrote to his mother off the Canary Islands on December 14, 1836, containing the passage so characteristic of one side of its author: "When I came home some months ago, after escorting Mathilde away, on entering the park I found a tree broken by the storm, and I said to myself, 'Our marriage will be broken off.' What I vaguely guessed has come to pass. Have I then exhausted in 1836 all the happiness in my lot?"

The presentiment was justified by events. Jerome was furiously angry with his nephew over the Strasburg fiasco. He wrote from Florence to his brother Joseph: "All that you say about Louis's extravagant ideas is quite true. We only know here what is in the papers, and that is sufficient to make us groan over so ridiculous an enterprise. . . . Poor Mathilde is very upset. We do our best to console her."

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Jerome's younger son was taken away from Arenenberg, where one of the advantages had been that Louis-Napoleon looked after his education, and was sent to Würtemberg, to be trained like his brother for the army. Mathilde settled down in her father's house at Quarto. She was no longer regarded as affianced to her cousin. In a letter to a friend, the Countess Le Hon, Hortense complains that she has had but one letter from her who was to have been her daughter-in-law. "Still," she adds, "I do not blame her for it, poor child. I do not suppose it was her fault at all. Her father will have forbidden her to make a sign. But you can understand that after this a reconciliation is scarcely possible. After marriage such things are always remembered. And it is she who will suffer. For whom will she marry, I should like to know? Her father has nothing but debts—and choice is difficult in a case like this."<sup>1</sup>

In a second letter to the same friend, Hortense declares her belief in the sincerity of Mathilde's attachment to her son, and reports that, after hearing of his attempt at Strasburg, her only remark was, "I love him the more for it." A mother's partiality is perhaps responsible for the strength of Hortense's conviction. It can-

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by M. F. Loliée in *Les Femmes du Second Empire (Papiers intimes)*. He states that he was shown the originals of Hortense's letters by the Princess Poniatowska, daughter of the Countess Le Hon.

not, however, be doubted that Jerome put very strong pressure upon his daughter. Relations between him and Hortense continued strained until her death a year after Strasburg, and he carried his bitterness against both mother and son so far that he did not write to the latter even a formal letter of condolence on his loss. The ex-King of Westphalia had in the interval struck up a friendship with Thiers, who, while on a visit to Florence, applied to him for assistance in collecting material for his history of the Consulate and the Empire, and in return held out to him hopes of getting permission to return to France, with a pension. Any connection with the Imperial pretender was therefore impolitic, and Jerome was not the man to sacrifice his personal interests to sentiment.

Very little is known about the life at Quarto between 1836 and 1840. Jerome's finances had been somewhat relieved by Madame Mère's legacy to him in the first year, for she divided her savings equally among all her children. Nevertheless, there were the debts of which Hortense had written, and he was compelled to exist in what was, for him, extremely modest style. He pinned his faith to the prospect offered by Thiers of King Louis-Philippe allowing his return to France. Thiers kept up a correspondence with him, and from one of the letters it seems that Jerome and Mathilde in 1838 broke a journey from Florence to Stuttgart

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in order to spend a few days with the Thiers family at Como. In subsequent letters we read of "the respectful friendship" felt by the whole family for the Princess, and the happiness it would be for them to lessen her sorrows. The efforts to secure Jerome's repatriation, however, met with no success, and even when Thiers himself formed a ministry in 1840 they remained unrewarded.

It is perhaps indicative of the disappointment of father and daughter at the long deferment of their hopes that in this same year, 1840, they both made marriages—and both marriages in which the wealth of the other parties concerned was more striking than their rank. Since Jerome had insisted that the engagement with Louis-Napoleon should be considered at an end, Mathilde had been sought by various suitors, to whom her beauty and name were a sufficient attraction to render them indifferent to the absence of a dowry. We need not pay too much attention to the statement in Marshal Canrobert's memoirs that she was asked in marriage by numerous princes, heirs to divers thrones, including the Duke of Orleans and the Tsarevitch—although, as we shall hear, she herself believed that the Tsar Nicholas desired her as a daughter-in-law. Jerome, however, certainly would not have refused her to any prince who could give her, and himself at the same time, an assured position. The suitors of

whose advances there can be no doubt are less illustrious in station. Prominent among these was Count Aguado, son of the Marquis of that name, head of an immensely rich banking family of Spanish origin. With his hand Mathilde might have had ten million francs, it is said.<sup>1</sup> But she preferred to wait, and it was not till after her twentieth birthday that she listened to an offer. Whether her wedding preceded or followed her father's is uncertain, owing to the fact that his was secret, and the exact date of it has not been discovered.

Jerome took as his third wife the Marchesa Bartolini-Badelli, a widow of about forty, though still possessed of good looks in addition to a fortune. He succeeded in presenting himself to her in so desirable a light that she accepted what was virtually only a morganatic marriage, never allowing her to take his title even after his return to France. Apart from this he treated her with base ingratitude and finally drove her away from him.

The Princess Mathilde made what seemed in the circumstances a still better match than her father's when, on November 1, 1840, she married

<sup>1</sup> Several French writers have pointed out how curious it is that, while Napoleon III. was engaged to the Princess Mathilde and afterwards married the Empress Eugénie, Aguado courted them both. When the Montijos, mother and daughter, came to Paris to live, they were on very friendly terms with the Aguado family there. The Count made no disguise of his feelings, and was found by a friend weeping over the Prince-President's wooing of Eugénie.

the Russian Count Anatole Demidoff, who enjoyed also the title of Prince of San Donato from the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Demidoffs were not of an old Russian family, the first of it being a Moscow armourer and ironfounder, who was taken up by Peter the Great, and who made a huge fortune through the discovery of mines in Siberia. His descendant Nicholas, Count Demidoff, entered the Imperial Guards very young, served as *aide-de-camp* to Catherine's favourite Patiomkin in two campaigns against the Turks, became gentleman of the bed-chamber to Catherine herself, and married the Baroness Strogonoff. Leaving the army he travelled about Europe, where he studied industrial methods to such purpose that, on his return, whatever he touched prospered. He imported into Russia workmen, and particularly miners, from abroad, grew grapes and olives in the Crimea, bred merino-sheep, Tibetan goats, English and Arab horses, and, while collecting pictures and artistic treasures incessantly and gaining a reputation for profuse philanthropy, raised his income to five million roubles a year. Napoleon's invasion of Russia caused him to return to the army, and he recruited a regiment himself, with which he fought at Borodino. In 1815 he came to Paris for several years, cultivating the society of artists and writers. Finally he retired to Florence with the post of Russian Minister to Tuscany. Here he spent his closing

years in ostentatiously magnificent style, having a household of a hundred persons and a theatre of his own, with a company of French actors, entertaining largely and giving away so much in charity that it was said his alms abolished beggary in Florence. In 1828 he died, leaving his money to his sons, Paul, Governor of the Ukraine, and Anatole.

This is one side of the medal. For the reverse we may turn to the memoirs of Count Horace de Viel-Castel. Few writers have dipped their pens so constantly in gall as Viel-Castel. What he says about Anatole Demidoff, however, is borne out by many others ; and he declares that the father, whom he had known personally, was as cowardly, as stupid, and as immoral as the son.

Anatole was born in Florence about 1813, and was therefore, when he married Mathilde Bonaparte, twenty-seven years old against her twenty. He held the post of chamberlain to the Tsar Nicholas, but divided his time between travels and his palace in Florence. Mathilde may have met him first in Florence, or possibly during her visit to Arenenburg after her mother's death ; for he was acquainted with Hortense and her son. In the year before she married him he brought out, through a Paris publisher, a sumptuous work entitled *Voyage dans la Russie méridionale et la Crimée, par la Hongrie, la Valachie et la Moldavie*. It

is said that he did not write a line of this himself. Nevertheless, on the strength of it, the Institut de France elected him a corresponding member, and no doubt his reputation was greatly increased in his native town of Florence, where already his income of ninety thousand pounds a year enabled him to rival his father's name as a *grand seigneur* and a philanthropist.

The Princess Mathilde is said to have been attracted to Demidoff mainly because he was a Russian—in which case she was doomed to pay dearly for her gratitude towards the Tsar Alexander. His looks were not greatly in his favour, although those who describe him as ugly seem to have in mind his appearance in premature old age and to forget that when a young man, visiting Paris soon after his marriage, he was considered a striking figure in his brilliant Circassian uniform. Of the badness of his manners we shall soon hear. We cannot help suspecting that it was his income which chiefly commended the match to the young Princess, coupled with her desire to escape from Quarto. As Demidoff's wife she would be able to enter that France which, though counted as a Frenchwoman, she had never yet seen. King Louis-Philippe, writes Thiers to her father in October, “charges me to congratulate you on the Princess Mathilde's marriage to Count Demidoff. She will be re-



ANATOLE DEMIDOFF.

Prince of San Donato.



ceived in France, after her marriage, with all the favour she deserves."

Little more than three months before Mathilde's wedding, occurred Louis-Napoleon's second attempt to force himself back into France, the affair of Boulogne, which led to his long imprisonment at Ham. It is possible that her cousin's folly had some effect in determining the Princess to accept Demidoff as her husband. Not so much because she still entertained at this time a desire to marry Louis-Napoleon (of this there is no evidence, whatever we may think about Hortense's statements after Strasburg) and now saw that she must renounce it, but because the Boulogne affair was a death-blow to the general hopes of repatriation cherished by the Bonapartes. The Countess Demidoff might go to Paris. Her father, like the rest of his family, must remain in exile for many more years. Jerome's bitterness towards his nephew was greatly increased.

It was in the early days of his imprisonment at Ham that Louis-Napoleon first heard of the marriage of the Princess Mathilde. He is reported to have shed tears at the news, and to have exclaimed, "This is the last bitter blow which Fortune had in store for me!" Some of his biographers attribute his long delay in taking a wife to his disappointment. There is no need to suppose that his passion was so

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deep as this. His was not the type of constant lover. Nevertheless, he sincerely admired his brilliant young cousin and fully proved to her in after life in what affection he held her. In return she showed a gratitude which was not at all characteristic of her family.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE COUNTESS DEMIDOFF

ONE of the most interesting passages in the *Journal* of the brothers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt is the description of an evening spent at the Princess Mathilde's house at Saint-Gratien in October, 1866. The company was a small one, and the hostess was in a curious mood. She was disinclined for the usual occupations of the evening, and as she sat with her guests she began to talk about her past life. She let her confession fall from her word by word, dreamily, with intervals of silence, during which she seemed to have no more to say. One hand played at random with the articles lying on the table at her side, and her downcast eyes wandered over the carpet. Although she habitually retired early, it was after twelve this night before she went up to bed. She recalled her first meeting with the Tsar Nicholas, after her marriage. "I will never forgive you for this!" was his greeting. He had wished to marry his son to a woman of Napoleon's family, she explained. (Whether

she interpreted him rightly we cannot say; it might seem rather that it was as Queen Catherine's daughter that she herself appeared a desirable wife for the Tsarevitch.) A sketch of Nicholas followed, one of those sketches à la Saint-Simon, which her courtiers like the Goncourts and Saint-Beuve so much admired.

In Nicholas she discovered something of the ogre-type—tempered, however, by his affectionate family disposition. He was an excellent father and kinsman. In his other relations a certain theatrical assumption of pitilessness did not astonish her, seeing how he was surrounded by rogues and thieves. Towards herself he was very paternal. As for Demidoff the Tsar never mentioned his name. He would come to their house, unguarded by any escort, and would stay to dinner. Terrible dinners, she added, during which the Tsar would not even look at Demidoff. Once he said to her, "Why don't you confide in me this evening?" She did not respond, whereon he continued. "When you have need of me you will always find me ready. Address yourself to me direct, through Count Orloff."

The Princess's reminiscences here appear to refer to the very early days of her married life. Now Demidoff's friends claimed that, though he was in disgrace with the Tsar at this time, it was merely because he, a member of the Orthodox Church, had agreed that his children, if any were born, should be brought

up as Roman Catholics ; and that, if he was at first deprived of his office of chamberlain, he was soon afterwards reinstated. But clearly this was a story designed for public ears, to conceal the unpleasant reality. Whatever illusions the Princess had about her husband must have been quickly shattered. Except on the occasion just mentioned, however, she was not wont to talk about the subject, so that little is known of her troubles at the beginning of her wifehood. Viel-Castel got some details from her old governess, whom after her marriage she retained as companion—the Baronne de Reding, as she was always called in Paris. She told Viel-Castel of Demidoff's utter lack of taste and his infamous behaviour towards the Princess ; of his open relations, under her very eyes in Florence, with the Duchess of Dino ; of his terror when the Tsar paid a visit to Florence, and his abject entreaties, on his knees, that she should not reveal his baseness. But Nicholas did not require to be told. “ You do not know what a ruffian you have married,” he said to Mathilde. “ Your Majesty is not generous,” she replied, “ in speaking to me of the man who is my husband.” The Tsar’s tone softened. “ Poor child, you will know it one day, and then you will come to me as your support. Count always upon my sincere attachment.”

From personal acquaintance Viel-Castel declares Demidoff the vilest man that could be

imagined—insolent to his inferiors, cringing to those who stood up to him, false, cowardly marked by every vice and not a single virtue, and ignorant as a carp. The picture may well be suspected of over-colouring; yet Demidoff, for all his literary ambitions, artistic tastes, and open-handed charities, had obviously a touch of the brute in him, or perhaps a strain of madness. The direct cause of his rupture with his wife was that, while he was extremely unfaithful to her—Madame de Reding's revelation about the Duchess of Dino might be capped by others far worse—he was also extremely jealous about her conduct. A recent writer, M. Frédéric Loliée, has suggested that Demidoff possibly had reasons for jealousy, and speaks of the pressing attentions in Florence of the Baron de Poilly, of Captain Vivien, and of Nieuwerkerke (of whom we shall hear so much later); but surely this is a matter concerning which strong evidence is required before we can attempt to palliate Demidoff's behaviour. Whatever the Princess Mathilde may have done after her separation, it cannot be brought up against her character before the separation took place. She was young, beautiful, and much courted, no doubt—but the deduction is more easy than just.

Part of the married life of the Demidoffs was spent in Paris, where the Count was for a time attached to the Russian embassy, and

where he had a fine *hôtel* in the Rue Saint-Dominique. The promise made by Thiers on behalf of King Louis-Philippe was carried out. No objection was made to Mathilde's presence, as Madame Demidoff, in the French capital, though the negotiations for her father's return still dragged on fruitlessly, to his infinite disgust. We have the Princess's own authority for August, 1841, as the date on which she first set foot on French soil.<sup>1</sup> When not in Paris the Demidoffs resided at San Donato. This splendid palace at least bore witness to the abilities of its owner as a collector of art-treasures. From what had been left to him by his father he had weeded out all that was inferior, and he had added many wonderful things from all over the world. In 1880, ten years after his death, a sale took place of the contents of San Donato, and the catalogue prepared on that occasion is in itself a very remarkable work. The Old Masters of the Dutch, Flemish, French, Italian, and Spanish schools; the modern paintings; the sculptures, including a large collection of busts of Napoleon I. and his family; the museum of Bonaparte relics<sup>2</sup>; the bronzes and tapestries

<sup>1</sup> See p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous portraits of Jerome and Catherine Bonaparte were at San Donato, together with historical pictures introducing them, and a quantity of Jerome's palace-furniture while he was King of Westphalia.

A copy of this catalogue is in the British Museum Library.

from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century; the porcelains from Sèvres, Vienna, Saxony, China, and Japan; the old furniture, much of it of historical interest; the valuable library; the hothouses full of rare orchids; the large cellar of wines—all these are fully set out, and the more artistic items are handsomely illustrated in the catalogue. The total amount realised at the sale was 6,844,445 liras in Italian money (roughly £274,000), of which the Old Masters alone accounted for more than two millions and a half, the library for over one hundred thousand, and the Imperial museum for over forty thousand liras. Such figures can give but a vague idea of the splendour of Demidoff's palace, which was universally described by his contemporaries as unique in the world.

At San Donato took place the scandalous scene which led Mathilde to avail herself of the offer the Tsar Nicholas had made to her years before. She had refused more than once, as we have heard, to take her "uncle" into her confidence. Now she conquered her pride. A ball was in progress at San Donato one night, when through the midst of his guests Count Anatole strode up to her and slapped her on both her cheeks. What excuse was made to the dancers does not appear. Mathilde locked herself up in her bedroom for the night, and next day set out for St. Petersburg. Nicholas

heard her story sympathetically, disgraced Demidoff, assigned to her out of his fortune a sum equivalent to £8,000 a year, and forbade him to live within a hundred miles of her. Husband and wife never met again after 1845.

The closing years of Louis-Philippe's reign were peaceful for the Princess Mathilde after she had been relieved of her husband's society. Renewed efforts were made to secure permission for her father and brothers to join her in Paris. The Government's attitude had softened so far that in May, 1845, Prince Napoleon was allowed to spend a month there. Yet when the younger Jerome was dying, two years later, he was not allowed to visit the baths of Vernet, which the doctors declared necessary for his health. The reason, no doubt, was Louis-Napoleon's escape from Ham in the interval. After the unfortunate young prince's death at his father's home at Quarto there was again a relaxation of severity, and we hear proposals for a direct petition through the Princess Mathilde to the King on her father's behalf. A petition was at last brought before the Chamber of Peers in June, 1847, and received Victor Hugo's warm support. Jerome, full of hope, proceeded with his son to Brussels, after warning his daughter of his action. At Brussels they received the authorisation for which they had waited so many years, and on October 1 the

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surviving members of this branch of the Bonapartes were for the first time in their lives all together on French soil.

The days of the Orleanist monarchy were numbered when this act of clemency was performed. Jerome used later to declare, wise after the event, that he knew when Louis-Philippe gave his consent the poor man was lost. Both he and his son watched with pleasure the upset of the kingdom. His daughter, on the other hand, in the presence of a dinner-table of guests five years afterwards, asserted that she had never desired Louis-Philippe's fall, and was happier under his rule than under the Empire. Her reception by the King and Queen had touched her heart. In the *Souvenirs* of the Prince de Joinville she is spoken of as a constant visitor at the intimate parties of Queen Marie-Amélie. Orleanist society in general followed the royal lead. Sainte-Beuve writes of these early Paris days of the Princess: "All who had the honour to meet her then can recall the admiration which surrounded her. Society gave her a warm welcome—proud to see itself adorned by this beautiful and dazzling Frenchwoman whom Italy had given back to it. The reigning family was perfect to the daughter of the Napoleons. The Princess Mathilde never forgot this. . . . She never appreciated nor tolerated in her presence a slighting remark upon those

who had protected her and laid her under an obligation."

Louis-Philippe was prepared to treat Jerome with equal generosity, if it is true that only the revolution of February, 1848, prevented him from conferring on him a pension of £4,000 and a peerage. But Jerome was not the kind of man to let the change of Government deprive him of his expectations. He hastened to declare the adhesion to the Republic of "the old soldier of Waterloo, the last brother of Napoleon," and to proclaim that the time for dynasties had passed in France. He was rewarded with the post of Governor of the Invalides and a salary of £1,800 a year; in addition, his former military rank of general was soon after restored to him, bringing him another £500. Prince Napoleon also was prompt to set forth republican views, which were perfectly genuine in his case. He was less fortunate, for he lost an annual allowance from his uncle William of Würtemberg by signing a letter to him "Citizen Bonaparte." The Princess Mathilde, grieving at the fate which had befallen the Orleans family, betrayed no enthusiasm over the new Government, and seems not to have taken any interest in politics until her cousin Louis-Napoleon called her to his assistance. In the house which she had rented, No. 10, Rue de Courcelles, in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, she set herself to collect about her

the artistic and literary society which she loved, and laid the foundations of her famous *salon*. Out of her income of £8,000 from the Demidoff estate she allowed her father one-fifth. On the remainder she was able to gratify her tastes comfortably down to the autumn of 1848, when a sudden emergency arose.

One of the results of the ruin of the Orleans monarchy was the removal of the ban against the Bonapartes and their numerous relations by marriage, who began to flock back to France from all over the world. Louis-Napoleon had his chance at last. He left England and hastened to Paris, whence he sent an urgent message to Mathilde. She was spending September in Dieppe, but at once set out to meet him again after an interval of twelve years. At their first interview there was naturally an exchange of reminiscences. Then Louis-Napoleon, explaining his situation, declared that the money necessary to him for his electoral campaign was lacking. The Princess Mathilde did not hesitate. She had some very fine jewels; these she hastened to pledge, and she brought the proceeds back to her cousin. Such is the account given by Marshal Canrobert.<sup>1</sup> Other writers add the information that the sum realised by the pledging of the jewellery was four thousand francs. This money, and what

<sup>1</sup> Germain Bapst, *Le Maréchal Canrobert*, founded on the Marshal's own manuscript reminiscences.



LOUIS NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.  
Afterwards the Emperor Napoleon III.



had been put at his disposal by his English mistress, "Miss H.," were the sole resources with which the future Emperor commenced the operations which in less than four years were crowned with complete success.

## CHAPTER V

### IN THE RUE DE COURCELLES

THE Princess Mathilde was one of those persons, generally esteemed fortunate and certainly rare, who succeed in making their everyday life follow closely the lines of their tastes. This is not to say that there were not many things in her existence which she would not have wished away, many things which she found lacking. But in the choice of her pursuits and the division of her days, she could, without difficulty, gratify the demands of her mind and heart. The proof of her contentment with her lot is the singular consistency of her life for the half-century between her arrival in France and her death. With the necessary variations due to place of residence and season of the year her days followed one another, each like the last. Her wealth gave her the power, her pronounced tastes the will, to order her affairs thus.

From the moment of her separation from Anatole Demidoff, we have seen, she was mistress of a handsome income, and this was

destined to be increased. As for her tastes, she was lucky in having two so strong that they dominated her, not indeed to the exclusion of all others, but to such an extent that most others were easily satisfied. She was passionately devoted to the art of painting, and passionately devoted to society as she interpreted it—the society, that is to say, of men of talent, especially in literature and art.

In his "Portrait of the Princess," Sainte-Beuve gives details of her artistic training, taken from her own mouth, and a generous appreciation of her talent. It was in the picture-galleries of Florence that she learnt, as a girl, to admire and copy the Old Masters. She had the right nature to profit by such an education. Her sense of the picturesque was remarkable, and she never ceased to cultivate it by study. When she became her own mistress her daily happiness was to escape for some hours of the morning or the afternoon to her beloved art. (Of this habit we shall frequently hear again.) In her studios, especially in the smaller and more private one of the two which she had at Saint-Gratien, where she could shut herself up entirely, she devoted herself to her water-colours, as fresh and vigorous as oils. There was nothing petty nor finicking about her style, nothing suggestive of woman's handiwork, whether she copied the masters or made life-studies from models or friends. After working

she was fond of visiting the public galleries, especially the Louvre. To those who spoke to her of modern pictures, such as she had on her walls, she would say, "Yes, these are my friends; but *those* are my idols." Her taste was classical—the natural taste of princes, says Sainte-Beuve, following La Bruyère—and she particularly admired historical paintings.

Viel-Castel, however, declares the Princess no *connaisseuse*. "She admires sixteenth-century Italian art because she was brought up in Italy to adore Raphael and his superb school, but she only understands one side of art, and some branches, such as engraving, she fails to understand at all." Of her own work he offers no criticism. A more recent writer, Baron Lumbroso, who was acquainted with the Princess in later life, speaks well of a number of her pictures which he saw himself, and refers to the public proofs of her merit at the Salon—an honourable mention in 1861, and a medal in 1865.<sup>1</sup>

To the Princess's great joy on one occasion, when the jury awarded her a medal at an exhibition of drawings and paintings at Metz, Sainte-Beuve bears testimony, having been present when she received the news. It was said that the jury was partly composed of Republicans, so that there could be no suspicion of favour about the award. The artist's face shone with satisfaction at the idea of success

<sup>1</sup> Baron A. Lumbroso, *L'ultima Nipote de Napoleone* (1904).

through merit, not by borrowed or reflected light. There can be no doubt that she took her work seriously. There is a story of a quarrel between her and Nieuwerkerke on this point once. She had exhibited two water-colours in some exhibition, and Nieuwerkerke reproached her with compromising herself thereby. He told her he had opposed the giving of an honourable mention to her, because she ought not to mix herself up with artists. The Princess replied vigorously, with a touch of her brother's freedom of speech, "I assure you I'm not one of those people who are more proud of having a chamberlain's key sewn on their behinds than of a distinction accorded to actual merit!" Nieuwerkerke, who had just been made Imperial chamberlain and was wearing his uniform everywhere, could only pocket the compliment in silence.

On another occasion we find the Princess indignant at a slight, not indeed against her own art, but against art in general; and here Nieuwerkerke was on her side. It was in early 1852, and Persigny, newly appointed Minister of the Interior, was dining at her house. He remarked to Nieuwerkerke that he was about to use all his influence to have the Louvre turned into an office for one of the Ministers, so as to concentrate the various departments in one neighbourhood. Nieuwerkerke, head of the Louvre, asked him whether he was joking.

"No," replied Persigny, "the pictures could be sent to Versailles, the Luxembourg, and elsewhere." "So," cried Nieuwerkerke, "you would destroy the marvellous galleries created by Napoleon himself, enriched with the fruits of his victories! . . . I would never let my name appear on the list of those who consented to such a thing. On the day this plan is adopted, I shall resign. Think of the worldwide fame of the Louvre, with its twenty-million francs' worth of masterpieces! Why not rather sell them?" "Why not," agreed Persigny, "if we can get twenty millions for them?" The other guests stared at one another, while Nieuwerkerke, turning livid, exclaimed, "If France touched such a depth of degradation . . . I would kill you, *M. le Ministre!*" The Princess, says Viel-Castel, the teller of the story, "who loves and understands the arts better than any one"—contrast what we have quoted from him above—"had tears in her eyes, and when the Minister had departed cried, 'I would rather leave France than listen to such monstrous nonsense!'"

So much, for the present, about the Princess's artistic tastes.<sup>1</sup> Her *salon*, maintained for fifty

<sup>1</sup> We may add that, with her admiration for painting and sculpture and her appreciation of literature, she did not combine much love of music. She had, says Sainte-Beuve, "a certain condescension for the vaguer art of music, though those present at her concerts during the winter months must admit that among her friends are some very fine voices."

years of her life, is a sufficient witness to her love of society and to the quality of the society which she loved. We have said that she sought out men of talent, especially in literature and art. And the predominance of men in her circle must be noted. She explained this fact well to Jules de Goncourt on one occasion. The brothers, who had first made her acquaintance in the previous summer, after they had brought out *Renée Mauperin*, received a very complimentary letter of invitation to dinner in the Rue de Courcelles. The other guests were Gavarni, Chennevières, and of course, Nieuwerkerke, while her companion of the time, Madame de Fly,<sup>1</sup> was the only lady present besides the Princess. "To-day," writes Goncourt, "she feels that she is among men, gives herself free rein, and is truly charming. She complains of the singularly lowered position of woman since the days of which we wrote, and expresses her vexation that women do not interest themselves in art or in new literature, nor show tastes which, if not like a man's, are at least elevated or uncommon. Among the women whom one sees or entertains, she says, there are so few with whom one can talk. 'Why, if a woman were to come in now, I should be obliged to change the conversation at once!'" On another

<sup>1</sup> Amiably dismissed by Viel-Castel as "an old fairy, formerly attached to Lady Wittingham, mistress of Prince Paul of Würtemburg."

occasion Jules de Goncourt notes how the Princess betrays, by her looks and her colour, the boredom inflicted upon her by stupid women. Claude Bernard was a guest at one of her receptions, and was talking with the Goncourts, while she was tied to two silly chatterers. Her face had a look of crucifixion on it, as she watched the men conversing, and when the two women had taken their departure she cried : “ Really it is quite enough to fritter oneself away in society up to the age of thirty—after that one ought to be left in peace and have no more to do with the wearisome side of entertainment ! ”

She declared her readiness to receive all the intelligent women of the day. Georges Sand had only to express the wish to come,<sup>1</sup> and she would not have drawn the line at Rachel. But the fact remains that the disproportion between the numbers of men and of women in her circle was very striking. As for the men, her visiting-list included the names of almost every one intellectually famous in France, and those of all distinguished strangers who came to Paris. In a later chapter we shall have the opportunity of mentioning some of the eminent persons who frequented her house. Time made changes, of course ; but one mark of her *salon* always

<sup>1</sup> She once said she loved Madame Sand—that is say, her books—because she amused her. She also declared that her work was moral, which made Viel-Castel explode with wrath. To him Georges Sand, though a remarkable woman, was a champion of *les voleurs et les vicioux*.

remained, that the hostess, where she had only herself to consult, made intellect the passport to her intimacy.

Despite her very strong personal preference for the artist and the man of letters rather than the politician, the Princess's attachment to her cousin's interests caused her in 1848, and increasingly during the immediately following years, to cultivate the political section of Paris society and to use her influence with her non-political friends even in the matter of their politics. It is said that it was largely through her and her brother that Sainte-Beuve was induced to give his approval to Louis-Napoleon's action in 1851. In every way she could she guided the opinion of those with whom she came in contact, to the furtherance of her cousin's ends. In apportioning what credit there is in the elevation of Louis-Napoleon among his various supporters the Princess Mathilde must receive a large share. Her money in the first instance, her introductions next, and finally her propagandist work, were invaluable to him. His gratitude was sincere, and he did his best to show it. He could do little in a material way for a woman so well off as she was. Even after the Empire's establishment he could only add a public grant to her large private income and bestow upon her a rank which distinguished her from all other princesses of the family. He might indeed

have done more, had she agreed. As the Empire approached, he revived the idea which had first been suggested at Arenenberg. Would she be his wife, now that wife meant Empress? According to Marshal Canrobert, the Prince-President had already sounded the Vatican, whose consent was necessary to turn the separation from Demidoff into a divorce, and had received a favourable reply. But the Princess Mathilde rejected the offer. She did so unhesitatingly, and with such firmness that it was not repeated. Yet, at the same time, she retained her cousin's affection undiminished.

In one of her familiar conversations at Saint-Gratien nearly twenty years later, after speaking of Napoleon and Eugénie, the Princess remarked: "I should never have got on with the Emperor, because I go straight ahead. I have never been mixed up in intrigues—never, never! I could never be turned into one of those people who weep and get their debts paid every six months." "What a man!" she exclaimed on another occasion. "He is neither open nor impressionable. Nothing disturbs him. His most angry word is 'How absurd!' Why, if I had married him, I think I should have broken his head open to see what was inside it!" Such were her later ideas. She can scarcely have formed her opinion so definitely about her cousin yet. Her reason for refusing his offer is said to have been that she felt she

had a part to play in the world of letters, arts, and sciences which she could accomplish better in the situation she had already made for herself than as Empress. This is perhaps what she told Louis-Napoleon. But if we may hazard a guess at the real cause of her refusal, it was because she did not love her cousin with the love for which he asked—and that she did love some one else.

We have already heard the name of Nieuwerkerke in connection with the Princess Mathilde's. It will be remembered that its bearer was one of those whose attentions to the Princess in her early married days in Florence have been mentioned as furnishing Anatole Demidoff with grounds for suspicion, although there is no evidence at all that the suspicion was just. At the period to which we have now come, however, the case is altered ; and, if we cannot assign a precise date to the beginning of the afterwards notorious connection, we seem justified in assuming that it was already formed when Louis-Napoleon became President of the French Republic.

The Count Alfred-Emilion de Nieuwerkerke came of a Dutch family settled in France. Viel-Castel, who was a member of his staff at the Louvre, and also related to him by marriage,<sup>1</sup> is very contemptuous about the claims to

<sup>1</sup> The Count's father married a cousin of Viel-Castel, the daughter of the Marquis de Vassan, who brought with her a dowry of 60,000 francs a year—of which he, as a poor cavalry officer, was very glad, says Viel-Castel.

nobility of the Nieuwerkerkes, bastards of some little stadholder. (They were, in fact, descendants of a left-hand marriage.) Emilion was a Parisian by birth. After the completion of his education by travels to the art-centres of Europe he returned to Paris and set up as a sculptor. He soon met with success, and was given by the King of Holland a commission for the bronze statue of William the Silent which is at The Hague. A plaster cast of this was exhibited at the Salon in 1843, when the sculptor was thirty-two years of age. After this, other notable commissions followed rapidly, and Nieuwerkerke's fame was sufficient to secure him at the end of 1849 the appointment of Director-General of the National Galleries, with a salary of twenty thousand francs (this, at least, was what he received in the early days of the Empire), and a suite of rooms at the Louvre. Viel-Castel has but a very moderate opinion of his talents. To him Nieuwerkerke appears ambitious rather than truly artistic, art being to him only the means to an end. As head of the Louvre he not only buys inferior pictures, but allows his restorer to ruin the masterpieces already there. He neglects his duties and dreams of the day when he will be Councillor of State and Senator. Like Prosper Mérimée he must be in everything.<sup>1</sup> He acts the *grand*

<sup>1</sup> "I am a member of nine committees!" boasted Mérimée to Viel-Castel once.

*seigneur*, worships pomp and display, and is full of the vanities of dress, wearing lapis-lazuli buttons on his waistcoat, his shooting-gaiters, and everywhere it is possible to put them.

This is a part of the portrait of Emilion de Nieuwerkerke to be gathered from Viel-Castel's malicious pages. It is only fair to contrast with it the sketch by the amiably garrulous Arsène Houssaye, Director of the Théâtre Français. To him Nieuwerkerke is not only a fine example of the works of Nature, with whom not one of the Cent Gardes of the Imperial Palace can compete, but also a sportsman, an aristocrat, and an *homme d'esprit*. He draws a pleasant picture of him in connection with the dying Alfred de Musset—many years later, of course, than the time of which we have been writing. De Musset, talking once with Houssaye and Viel-Castel (the latter an old schoolfellow of his), spoke of his sorrow at the thought of passing away without seeing again his friends Raphael, Giorgione, and Leonardo da Vinci. Houssaye suggested that he ought to see them at the Louvre on one of the nights when Nieuwerkerke, in his official capacity, gave a torchlight reception to some sovereign passing through Paris. It was his dream to see the pictures by night, replied de Musset, but he wanted to be alone—which was like asking for a performance of the Opera for himself only, remarks Viel-Castel.

Nieuwerkerke heard of the poet's wish, and next day there came an invitation to visit the Louvre by torchlight. When his guest arrived Nieuwerkerke proposed that he should see the beloved Masters alone, while he himself entertained Houssaye and Viel-Castel, whom he had invited to supper with them. De Musset assented gratefully, and went to pay his last respects to La Gioconda and his other favourites. Then he rejoined the other three, pale and wet-eyed. "My dear Nieuwerkerke," he said, "it can easily be seen that you are by birth both a great artist and a great gentleman."<sup>1</sup>

A somewhat similar instance of Nieuwerkerke's kindness of heart is recorded. When Horace Vernet, the celebrated painter, was dying, towards the end of 1862, Nieuwerkerke wrote a letter, in which he pleaded that there was still time for a mark of distinction to soften Vernet's last moments and to repair an omission, for no one had done more than Béranger and Vernet to uphold the Imperial tradition among the people. This letter was not addressed to the Emperor, but its recipient showed it to Napoleon at Compiègne; and the consequence was that a promotion in the Legion of Honour was conferred upon Vernet not long before his death. If Nieuwerkerke was as personally ambitious as Viel-Castel makes out, at least he was also generous in his support of other men.

<sup>1</sup> Houssaye, *Les Confessions*, iv. pp. 286-8.

Among those for whom his advocacy was early given was Gavarni<sup>1</sup> the caricaturist (classed by Jules de Goncourt with Balzac as one of the two greatest men of the century), whom he induced the Prince-President to decorate in 1852; and the assistance of the Rue de Courcelles, never denied to merit, was in some part due to his promptings, it is clear.

Nieuwerkerke's first meeting with the Princess Mathilde at Florence must have taken place while he was on his European tour. They met again in Paris when he had begun to make a name for himself in sculpture, and no doubt the acquaintance developed rapidly; for when we begin to get detailed accounts about the connection it has all the appearance of long standing, and for an irregular union is surprisingly regular in its conduct. Two obstacles stood in the way of its regularisation, Anatole Demidoff and the Comtesse de Nieuwerkerke. Of the latter we hear nothing until she is on the point of death, after a third stroke of paralysis in 1863; but she existed, nevertheless, whatever may have been the facts of her marriage with her husband. There is therefore no answer to the attacks of those who complained of the double outrage against propriety in the *liaison*.

<sup>1</sup> Gavarni, if not one of the most intimate circle of the Princess's friends, was at least one of her most fervent admirers. He declared that he found her from the very first day of their acquaintance *diantrement séduisante* (Sainte-Beuve, *Lettres à la Princesse*, p. 231).

between Nieuwerkerke and the Princess Mathilde. Yet they assuredly would have aroused no great scandal in their period—one of singularly lax morals—had it not been for the lady's rank. It is not, indeed, until after she had received her title of Imperial Highness and her handsome pension from the Civil List that the tongue of censure began to stir. And then, except when personal spite or political antipathy envenomed it, criticism was not very bitter towards the Princess, who claimed, in effect, that since she might not have a husband she should at least be allowed to have a lover. All her friends treated Nieuwerkerke as a matter of course. If you went to the Rue de Courcelles you saw him, and if the Princess accepted an invitation to dinner you asked him too. A few outward forms were kept up, but could deceive only the simplest of observers, especially as Nieuwerkerke was too sure of himself to be tactful.

In this line of conduct the Princess Mathilde showed her usual frankness and that openness which at times approached her brother Napoleon's indifference to public opinion. But she is not to be called shameless for seeing no shame in it. Nor, certainly, was she an immoral woman, as represented by writers hostile to the family of Bonaparte. If any one is wishful to see to what depths malice against her could descend he should look at a pamphlet,

published in Paris on the fall of the Second Empire and entitled *La Fille Mathilde Bonaparte, Femme Demidoff*. The author, who calls himself the Citizen Vindex, has no terms bad enough for the whole Imperial family. Napoleon III., for instance, is "the scoundrel of December [1851] and Sedan," "the sanguinary ruffian who brought on us all our ills"; Eugénie, "the courtesan of Madrid and Spa, the intriguer who did not reject the assassin's hand"; and so on. As for Mathilde, her life from childhood has been infamous, and her cultivation of the vain crowd of artists and poets was only designed, as in the case of Hortense Beauharnais, to secure herself a spurious certificate of good character from them. It is clear that we need not trouble ourselves with the ravings of Citizen Vindex.

A search for some specific charge against the Princess, outside her long-enduring connection with Nieuwerkerke, fails to reveal anything except the tale in Viel-Castel about her and Edouard Delessert.<sup>1</sup> This is very circumstantial. But the odious Viel-Castel, as he must very often have been called, is nothing if not circumstantial in all his tales against the French aristocracy, and leaves scarcely a man or a woman in it with a shred of reputation. His "little black books" (in which he kept his

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires*, May 5, 1857. The incident is stated to have occurred at least three years before.

diary) were famous in his lifetime, and many coveted a glance at them, to see what was said about their neighbours. After his death they were published, when his victims heartily wished him alive again, to tell him what they thought of his remarks about themselves. Now Viel-Castel was for many years a friend of the Princess and a welcome guest at her house, where the scandalmongering at which he was so adept was by no means barred. At the beginning of the *Mémoires* he deals gently with her character, but gradually his tone grows sharper, and his dissatisfaction with Nieuwerkerke makes him look on her too with a censorious eye. His reminiscences have great value in helping to form an estimate of the Princess. To treat them as of unquestionable authority, however, would be absurd.

The lapse of the Princess Mathilde from the approved path, when she accepted Emilion de Nieuwerkerke as her lover and made such inadequate attempts to screen the affair from the world, ought really to be her best protection from promiscuous accusations of light behaviour. She was the faithful mistress, not the *grande amoureuse*; and Viel-Castel himself does not dispute her devotion to Nieuwerkerke, though he has somewhat to say of the latter's intrigues with other women and lack of real passion for the Princess.

It was necessary to deal frankly at some point

in this book with the question of the Nieuwerkerke connection, which continued through so many years of the Princess's life, because to gloss it over would be to ignore one side of her nature—the “full-blooded womanhood,” in Sainte-Beuve's phrase. And it has seemed convenient to do so thus early in her story in order to emphasise the fact that behind the magnificence of her public life, behind even the intimacies of her circle of friends, she had a yet more intimate existence, which was practically that of a married woman.<sup>1</sup> This phase, in which Nieuwerkerke was her partner, had already begun when Louis-Napoleon offered her his hand again, if it is true that he did so when the Empire was actually in sight. It is easy, therefore, to understand why she declined without hesitation a proposal which was so flattering to ambition.

<sup>1</sup> Viel-Castel mentions, without expressing any opinion as to its credibility, some gossip about a son of the Princess and Nieuwerkerke being brought up secretly in the neighbourhood of the Rue de Courcelles. It was said that the old Marquis de Bruslard, librarian at the Louvre, was approached by Nieuwerkerke, who asked him to acknowledge the boy as his. The Marquis, though a friend of long standing, demanded 30,000 francs (*Mémoires*, June 21, 1857).

## CHAPTER VI

### SOME CRITICISMS OF THE PRINCESS

IN the spring of 1849 a visitation of cholera in Paris drove the Princess Mathilde to take up her residence in the Pavillon de Breteuil, standing in the park of Saint-Cloud. With her she brought a house-party, her invariable plan from this time onwards when away from Paris. On this occasion the party included Count Nieuwerkerke and some of the Murats—the family of Lucien, Prince of Ponte Corvo, son of Joachim Murat and Caroline Bonaparte. Among the latter was the eldest daughter Caroline, then sixteen, who left behind her at her death more than half a century later, a collection of very ill-natured reminiscences.<sup>1</sup> In these the Princess Mathilde receives better treatment than most of her kindred, but certainly does not altogether escape the lash. “My girlhood’s love for her was almost worship,” wrote the Princess Caroline; whereon we are compelled to wonder that she thought

<sup>1</sup> *My Memoirs*, by the Princess Caroline Murat, published in English in 1910.

fit to repeat a very malicious but far from new tale of the Princess Mathilde, Nieuwerkerke, and the dog which scrambled on the bed one night and was indiscreetly chidden by them both the next morning.

The life at Breteuil is described by Caroline Murat in terms which, with a few alterations, would serve to outline the course of most of the summer holidays at Saint-Gratien in later years. Her aunt, as she calls her—she was really her father's first cousin, but "in Breton fashion" she was aunt—never appeared until *déjeuner*, which was about eleven o'clock; the guests were free to ramble as they liked before this. After *déjeuner* a move was made to the studio, which at Breteuil stood at a very short distance from the house. Here most of the day was spent, the Princess Mathilde painting from an Italian model, and Nieuwerkerke working on a bust of Caroline. When the weather was fine, drives were taken in the neighbourhood, to Versailles, etc. One day they went over to Enghien to breakfast with Mlle. de Courbonne, an old friend of the Princess, and after the meal a visit was paid to Saint-Gratien. The Princess was delighted with the château and also with the pavilion adjoining it, which had once belonged to Marshal Catinat. On the way home she could talk of nothing else and declared she must buy Saint-Gratien. Less than two years later she had hired the château, and

before long she had become the owner not only of it but of the pavilion as well.

We are reminded of a story of Mathilde's father when King of Westphalia. Lunching one day with Jordis, the Westphalian banker, at his country house near Cassel, Jerome took such a fancy to the place that, as he left, he said, "This house belongs to me!" and, overwhelmed as he was in debt, he paid Jordis thirty thousand thalers for the property. The daughter, it is true, was far removed from debts.

The current of life flowed very quietly for the Princess Mathilde during the greater part of her cousin's presidency, and in the Paris season she was able to devote herself to the development of her *salon*. In 1851 affairs began to stir, and it is in this year that Viel-Castel began his "little black books," which tell us so much about the Princess. The very first entry mentions a dinner at No. 10, Rue de Courcelles, when the conversation is very animated and witty. Records of dinners, concerts, and receptions there follow in such rapid succession that we could almost construct a skeleton history of the Princess's life at this period from Viel-Castel alone. She gave him ample opportunity of studying her in her home, keeping him with a few others after the majority of her guests had gone, to drink tea round the table while she gave rein to

her opinions without fear of the consequences. We see her quick-tempered but kind-hearted, promptly giving the lie to those that express a view which displeases, but easily pardoning again. On one point she is inflexible. She shares the *Napoléonâtrie*, as he calls it, of all the Bonapartes, to whom there is only one cult and one authority, both coming down from the Emperor Napoleon. "You may discuss religious ideas and religion itself, but not Napoleon," he observes. The Princess will have none of aristocracy, of the influence of birth, or of the importance of family traditions, except in the case of the Bonapartes. "Everything must be forgotten save the great man, whose acts may not be criticised nor his faults mentioned. It is the most absolute fetichism imaginable. France is very little without the Bonapartes. The old royalty is scarcely worth remembering, and it is almost a crime to compare Bonaparte with Charlemagne!"

With regard to the present heir to the Imperial throne, though we shall hear of her readiness to admit his frailty in one respect, he must not be accused of base actions. On one occasion a visitor, Torchon de Lagrenée, suggested that a certain assassination plot under the monarchy had been subsidised by Louis-Napoleon. "I shall never forget," says Viel-Castel, "the Princess's indignation, her sudden splendid flush, the two tears which

ran down her cheeks, nor her words of contempt and wrath to the insolent fellow. She was magnificent, truly queenly." And those who attempt to thwart the Prince-President's policy now stir her to anger. Montalembert is denounced as a "Jesuit" because he leads the opposition in the Assembly in February, 1851, to the proposed grant to His Highness; and "Jesuit" with her is a strong term of abuse.

For one member of her family, however, the Princess Mathilde has no admiration, Lucien's son Charles, Prince of Canino. According to her, he had been a bad son, and was still a bad father and a bad husband. Viel-Castel cordially agrees. Lucien's sons are all a lot of brigands, and Canino is a hideous person, an utter revolutionary (though, after publicly declaring that he has renounced his title for ever, he has had printed on his cards "Prince Charles Bonaparte"), and a low intriguer against his cousin Louis-Napoleon. At first the Princess is on visiting terms with Canino, and listens to him denouncing in her drawing-room the Pope and the French garrison in Rome with "true Mazzinian politeness"; but in June they no longer speak. Canino had been publicly insulted by Count Rossi, who accused him of being his father's assassin in Rome some years before. Canino asked Nieuwerkerke to be one of his seconds in a duel with Rossi. Nieuwerkerke, refusing, was promptly called out by

Canino's brother, Pierre Bonaparte, destined one day to be very notorious, and, in the duel which followed, was wounded in the thigh. This ended the Princess's tolerance for these cousins of hers.

Already at this time the Princess Mathilde, though without an official position, has a household which is nearly as large as when she became *Altesse Impériale*. There is the old Baronne de Reding, whom the Princess Caroline Murat describes as always half-asleep over her knitting on quiet evenings in the Rue de Courcelles. There are Madame Desprez and Madame Ratomska, and the latter's husband, Ratomski, who later is called private secretary of the Princess. There is Eugène Giraud, her painting-master. And there is Nieuwerkerke, who is a kind of master of the ceremonies in the household.

The old Baroness, however, is soon carried off by death, to the deep sorrow of the Princess, to whom she had been a second mother. Viel-Castel, dining in the Rue de Courcelles on the evening of her funeral, describes how on his first expression of sympathy as he entered, the Princess was so overcome by emotion that she was obliged to retire to weep for a few minutes in another room. All through dinner and afterwards the talk was about the departed. Viel-Castel, not wont to admit such a thing about any one, declares that she was a good

woman, whose death leaves the Princess very lonely. "I can see no one about her who can take this old friend's place." He is much afraid that it will be given to Madame Desprez, the Princess's reader, of whom he draws a terrible portrait. She is affected, false, self-satisfied, spiteful to all, immoral in more ways than one. She is bringing up two children, who she says were left to her care by a friend; but Viel-Castel roundly calls them her bastards, and says that the daughter Marguerite, who is living in the Princess's house with her mother, is very like the Duc de Praslin, Madame Desprez's former lover. When what he fears happens, and his bugbear succeeds to the Baroness de Reding's post, it is the Princess who is the *dame de compagnie*, and Madame Desprez who lectures her in a loud voice and acts as mistress of the house. The *salon* in the Rue de Courcelles becomes truly deplorable under the influence of her and her friends, whose talk is revolutionary, anti-clerical, Bohemian—in fact, all that Viel-Castel the *mondain* dislikes.

Of the Ratomskis, Viel-Castel abuses the husband, though he says nothing against the wife. Eugène Giraud finds no favour at all in his eyes, nor his elder brother, Charles, a member of the Institut de France, a frequent visitor to the house. They are a couple of little revolutionaries, quite unsuited for aristocratic

cratic society, but clever enough to gain a great influence over the Princess Mathilde; and Eugène makes a very good thing out of his position of painting-master to her, while posing as a poor man and being commonly known as "*ce pauvre Giraud.*"

In fact, there is no one about the Princess Mathilde, now that the Baronne de Reding is dead, for whom Viel-Castel will speak a good word. "The Princess has a frank and loyal character," he says. "Unfortunately she is not sufficiently acquainted with the world as it actually is. She sees sheep in all who come and bleat, and tigers in all who don't. Poor woman, she will be betrayed one day by these pretended sheep!" So again, two years later, he apostrophises her: "Poor Princess Mathilde, you are indeed in bad company, and no one gives you good advice. Gradually you surrender yourself to those who fawn on you. Flattery gets a hold upon you and conquers you, though they who kiss your hands would deny you if fortune ceased to favour you. You are betrayed by the very people of your household, and every one of your remarks is repeated, with additions, your dislikes are told and your imprudences noted down. Princess, you are sold, and you have no idea of it!"

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that the impressions of this very misanthropic diarist were not shared by the rest of the visitors to

the Rue de Courcelles at any period of the Princess's reign there. Still we must have not only the light, but also the shade; and Count Horace, if he had a deplorable warp in his mind, was a clever, well-educated,<sup>1</sup> and observant man. Although the Princess's acquaintance was very interesting, and doubtless also useful to him, he was not attracted to her house, like many others, by hope of gain. He protests on one occasion that he has given her a great number of artistic treasures to adorn her cabinets; for he was a wealthy man, and brought to his work as one of the keepers of the Louvre a knowledge gained through his own private collections. He certainly esteemed her highly at first, and if it is easy to follow his disillusionment as time goes on, the cause is not far to seek. Her political friends were, as has been said, the people whom he most disliked. Her lover was his official chief, against whom he had the numberless grievances of the subordinate official. Nieuwerkerke seems to have suspected little of this until the quarrel of 1863; the Princess, so frank and outspoken herself, still less. The posthumous publication of the famous *cahiers noirs* must have enlightened them both painfully as to the thoughts of Count Horace de Viel-Castel, the man for whose

<sup>1</sup> He published some novels, a book of verse, a history of French costume, a work on Marie Antoinette and the Revolution, etc., and compiled a catalogue of the Louvre.

nomination to the Legion of Honour they had once striven so hard, as he himself is obliged to admit. The story of the Princess's conduct when the honour was at length granted is too characteristic of her to be omitted. In August 1854, on the eve of his fifty-second birthday, Viel-Castel says he received a letter from Fould announcing that he was to be made *chevalier*. He went down to Saint-Gratien. The Princess met him, put the red ribbon in his buttonhole, and then cried, "Come, kiss me now!" "It seems that I was very awkward in my embrace," remarks Viel-Castel, "and as embarrassed as a schoolboy."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE LAST DAYS OF THE REPUBLIC

ALTHOUGH she had still to wait for the coming of the Second Empire before receiving a definite position in the social hierarchy, the Princess Mathilde, from the beginning of her cousin's presidency, acted as hostess at the Elysée on ceremonial occasions. She cultivated carefully the acquaintances there made, for the advancement of the cause. Among the guests at her house in the year of the *coup d'état* are found those arch-conspirators Persigny and Morny. The former, Louis-Napoleon's faithful bulldog, dines with her in April, and makes himself very agreeable, though Viel-Castel pronounces his manners to be as much like a gentleman's as chicory is to coffee, and elsewhere styles him a low intriguer, who hates both the Princess and Nieuwerkerke because they will not bow down to his power. Morny comes to dinner in the following month, accompanied by his father, the Comte de Flahault, who is rapidly becoming a mummy, says the same charitable observer. This invitation to Morny was an important step



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(*After Giraud.*)



in the career of Louis-Napoleon's illegitimate brother. The two men had drawn together in 1849, but the recognition of Morny by the other members of the Bonaparte family was slow. The Prince of Canino extended his hospitality to him in April 1851, at the house which he shared with his daughter Julie and her husband Rocca-giovine. It was the Princess Mathilde's action in opening her door to him, however, which gave Morny his passport into the family circle.

Charles - Auguste - Louis - Joseph, Comte de Morny originally by no better right than that of assumption of the title, does not enter very largely into our story, and his character has been so often described that we need not stop to give him special mention here. But it may be noted that he had, like the Princess herself, certain Orleanist sympathies to restrain in becoming advocate of the schemes of the Prince-President. What Morny's ambition helped him to do, the Princess was enabled to do by the republican leaven in her mind—for she combined in a curious manner Imperialist and republican ideas with respect for the Orleans family. Her brother Prince Napoleon, at this time as generally, was hand-in-glove with the extreme Reds, and welcomed one of their clubs in the rooms which he had at old Jerome's residence at the Hôtel des Invalides. Prince Napoleon's conduct, said his enemies, was designed to injure his cousin's cause. But it is to

be noted that his sister, whom no one could accuse of being hostile to the Prince-President, expressed approval of an alliance between the Reds and the Elysée, if the former could be persuaded to support the latter's claim for a revision of the constitution.

The Princess was not in the secret of the *coup d'état*, though she had played her part in preparing the way for it. When it was carried out she was in the Rue de Courcelles, after her first summer spent at Saint-Gratien. An account of her behaviour on the celebrated 2nd of December is given by the Princess Caroline Murat, who seems not unwilling to let her appear in an unheroic light. The Princess Caroline had in the previous year married the Baron de Chassiron, an Orleanist noble of small distinction.<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 1851 she was on a visit to her hospitable "aunt." On the fateful evening news was brought to the Rue de Courcelles that the Elysée was being mobbed and the Prince-President in danger. The Princess Mathilde, in a state of great anxiety, had packed up all her valuable jewels and was sitting on the cases. She implored Caroline to drive to the Elysée and see what was happening. The younger woman got through the excited mob, not without adventure, and was hustled into the Elysée by the servants there. Returning to the Rue de Courcelles, she was begged by

<sup>1</sup> Viel-Castel calls him a dissolute fool.

the Princess to go back and pass the night at the palace, in order to give her the news. So Caroline went back again and spent what proved to be a very quiet night at the Elysée.

We hear nothing of this tale from other sources, and only know that the Princess Mathilde, like her father and brother, was among the multitude that hastened early in the morning of December 3 to congratulate the Prince-President on his successful stroke against his enemies in the Government.

After the *coup d'état* a state of pleasurable anticipation prevailed among the members of the Bonaparte family, marred in some cases by extravagant estimates of personal merits. Both Jerome and his son gave trouble. Prince Napoleon, indeed, whether in disgust at his cousin's triumph or because he was strongly recommended to retire for a while, went on a visit to London. The ex-King, in whose society Louis-Napoleon had recently been styled commonly "the villain" and "the ruffian," and who had himself been wont to exclaim, "I must have his blood," was prepared, indeed, to forget little trifles like these; but, having been disappointed of his hopes of the presidency of the *Comité consultatif*, expressed his annoyance in a letter, which he had published in the Italian newspapers. There was a rumour that he had in consequence been given six months' leave from his duties at the Invalides. On the con-

trary, however, his long-suffering nephew raised him to the rank of Marshal of France, and at the *Te Deum* service at Notre-Dame on New Year's Day he took his seat among the marshals, the only one in full-dress uniform covered with gold lace, it was remarked. Mathilde did not imitate the tiresome conduct of Jerome and Napoleon. But she did not hesitate to express her disapproval of one of the early acts of the reorganised Government, an act which aroused opposition more powerful than hers.

On January 22, 1852, there came out two decrees confiscating the property of the Orleans family in France. This measure was urged upon Louis-Napoleon by some of his most faithful supporters, such as Persigny. On the other hand, it was vigorously combated by Morny, and was made the excuse for his retirement from office. Morny had been rewarded for his great share in the *coup d'état* with the Ministry of the Interior. To his fellow-workers he seemed to be drawing too much power to himself, and a whole crop of intrigues sprang up. It became a question whether Morny or several others must go. It is said that the Prince-President was seriously annoyed at the indiscreet talk which his half-brother had already begun to hold about their common mother, and was therefore the more inclined to part with him when the necessity for a choice arose. It was also reported that Morny had

demanded a dukedom for his services, and resented the refusal of his demand. In any case, when the question of the Orleans confiscation was under discussion, he agreed to resign his ministry. No doubt he had very strong feelings, if we cannot accuse him of principles, in the matter; he had been brought up in Orleanist circles and he had an Orleanist mistress, the Countess Le Hon, the former friend of Hortense Beauharnais. Moreover, he certainly gained no little popularity by his apparent independence when he resigned his portfolio and was not even "kicked upstairs," but remained simple deputy for his constituency of Puy-de-Dôme. On this accession of popularity he was far too intelligent not to have calculated.

With the Princess Mathilde there was no question of pretexts or calculations. She objected to the anti-Orleanist decrees because she thought them unjust. She wrote to her cousin begging him not to sign them, and when he did so she was furious, and exclaimed to Viel-Castel, at her own house, "If Louis-Philippe was ever jealous of the President, he would, were he living to-day, feel avenged!"

Sainte-Beuve, writing many years later of the Princess's attitude now, says that "when unfortunate circumstances drove the Imperial policy to take doubtless unavoidable measures of State against the property of the banished dynasty, she and the Duchess of Hamilton,

listening only to their own feelings and actuated by nothing else, brought honour upon themselves by a step of which the intention deserves all praise." It may be admitted that the Princess's protest did credit to her heart. But, nevertheless, there was ample reason for not leaving property worth three hundred million francs in the hands of sworn enemies of the Government; property, moreover, much of which Louis-Philippe's family had acquired by similar methods of spoliation twenty years earlier. The Legitimists, at least, supporters of the elder Bourbons, did not feel called upon to condemn the State's resumption now of the so-called Orleans property.

The Duchess of Hamilton, who is coupled by Sainte-Beuve with the Princess Mathilde in the sentence quoted above, was one of the Princess's intimate acquaintances at this period. The Princess Marie, youngest daughter of Charles-Louis-Frederic, Grand-Duke of Baden, and Stephanie Beauharnais, had married in 1843 the Marquis of Douglas—William Alexander Anthony Archibald Douglas, son of the tenth Duke of Hamilton, Brandon, and Châtelherault, and himself afterwards the eleventh Duke. As the child of Napoleon's adopted daughter, Lady Douglas was styled a cousin of the Princess Mathilde, and she and her husband visited and in turn entertained the Princess now. The last-named did not hesitate to express her belief

in the story of Lady Douglas's intimacy with the Prince-President. She was prone, indeed, to repeating gossip of this kind about him. Her *salon*, although in other respects she kept its tone at a high level, was not by any means free from the reproach of evil-speaking and slander, nor did she herself refrain from occasionally spreading stories of which even their truth would not be a sufficient excuse for telling them in company.<sup>1</sup> Among those whom she did not spare was her brother, who unhappily gave her only too much occasion for caustic comment. To her credit, however, she scarcely ever alluded—even Viel-Castel records but one instance of an allusion—to her father's manner of life. Yet the old reprobate was a great trial to her, and at the beginning of 1852, in particular, treated her in a most disgraceful fashion.

It has been mentioned that she had been wont to allow to him forty thousand francs, one-fifth of her annual allowance from Demidoff. When he was created Marshal of France with a salary of thirty thousand francs, bringing his total official income up to £3,600 a year, she saw no necessity to continue her contribution. But Jerome, finding that his marshalship thus

<sup>1</sup> Writing in his diary in 1857, Lord Malmesbury tells how three English ladies, visitors to one of the Imperial house-parties at Compiègne, were amused and struck at the freedom in conversation and manners there, which was particularly remarkable in the Princess Mathilde. It would have been interesting to know who the three English ladies were. Without such knowledge, we must not treat this charge against the Princess too seriously,

lost him ten thousand francs a year, was furiously angry, and wrote to Demidoff, proposing in exchange for a certain sum to deliver to him proofs in writing of the Princess's intimacy with Nieuwerkerke. According to one story, Demidoff took the letter to the Tsar Nicholas, who merely returned it to him with an expression of contempt for Jerome. It is difficult to know how much belief to put in the unpleasant tale ; but unhappily Jerome's general conduct throughout life was not such as to prompt us to repudiate an accusation of the kind. It seems true that, encouraged by the villainous Prince of Canino, he blackmailed his nephew with threats to produce letters in which Louis Bonaparte affirmed his certainty that his reputed third son owed nothing to him. Louis-Napoleon was extremely sensitive on this point, having always by him, in Morny, a proof of his mother's frailty subsequent to his own birth. He could himself put at their actual worth his father's morbid imaginings ; but he remembered the advice of Napoleon I. not to wash family linen in public, which made it advisable to tolerate Jerome rather than defy him.

It is impossible not to sympathise with Louis-Napoleon's plaintive retort to his uncle on one occasion, when accused of having nothing of the great Napoleon about him. "Yes, I have his family!" He had, indeed. A curious picture is drawn of them by the Countess Bern-

storff, who with her husband was visiting Paris in November 1852, and was introduced by the Prussian representative, Hatzfeldt, to the circle of the Prince-President. The Countess writes to her mother :

“ You can have no idea of what the society at Saint-Cloud is like. Louis-Napoleon’s family is too impossible for anything ! The rooms of that beautiful palace are frequented by the commonest people. You would hardly believe what peculiar-looking creatures the Bacciochis and others are. The Prince is decidedly the flower of the flock. . . . Prince Jerome is also a remarkable-looking man ; but the most preposterous person is his son, the future Emperor —that is, unless the Prince-President has children. He is a big, strong man, with fine features, but he is coarse *au possible*. ”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Bernstorff Papers*, Eng. trans., i. 184. It must be remembered that the Countess’s father, Baron von Koenneritz, had been Saxon Minister in Paris throughout the reign of Louis-Philippe, and that Queen Marie-Amélie had shown a constant interest in the Baron’s children, for which they owed her gratitude. Indeed, writing to her mother again two years later, after a visit to the exiled Orleans family in England, Countess Bernstorff says of Marie-Amélie : “ She has always been a model to me of all that a Christian woman, a mother, and a Queen should be. She had shown herself truly great when on the throne, but she was still great now in her exile. . . . Through all her misfortunes she has retained the same fresh sympathy, and her truly religious mind and trust in God are a constant support to her.”

Yet there were many who criticised the Orleans Court as dull, heavy, undignified, abounding in badly dressed women, and presided over by a king, at least, who had no idea of how to fill his position.

The Princess Mathilde and her father had a quarrel over the affair of the withdrawn allowance, which lasted three years. Since she was usually as ready to forgive as she was quick to take offence, we may assume that she had serious ground for complaint. The break was the less painful to her because she and her father had so little in common. With her brother Napoleon, much as she despised his arrogant libertinism, she shared æsthetic tastes, and to some extent political views. But Jerome really cared nothing for art, letters, or politics. He and his son lived peacefully together, it may be suspected, because Napoleon, though intellectually so far above the old man, had an equal appetite for the lower pleasures. "My brother," wrote Napoleon I. to Jerome once, "you love both the table and women. The table besots you, and women bring you an ill name." But the brother did not amend his ways. His son and he met on a common plane where such things were concerned. Prince Napoleon, understanding Papa (as he always called him), retained a true affection for him to the end of his life. Jerome, on his part, was always generous with his money to his son.

In all the reported table-talk of the Princess Mathilde there are only two references to her father during her childhood's days. One is the record already mentioned of her mother's devotion to "Fifi." The other was made on an

occasion when she was a guest at Sainte-Beuve's table, and insisted on carving. Her father had always carved, she said. He had very pretty hands, with which he used even to eat his salad. When told that this was not correct, he retorted: "In my time, if we didn't do so, we should have been scolded, and accused of having dirty hands."

Jerome paid the penalty of being the selfish father of a quick-sighted daughter. But, as we have said, she restrained what inclination she had to exercise her caustic tongue upon his misdeeds. This is Viel-Castel's only imputation to her of a reference to Jerome's manner of life. Prince Napoleon had been to dinner with her, and after he had left she deplored, to those who remained behind, the ill name of the home which he shared with their father and the father's mistress, Madame de Plancy.

In the autumn of 1852 the imminence of Empire was obvious to all. The Prince-President returned in October from a tour in Southern France, skilfully organised by Persigny, Morny's successor as Minister of the Interior. Paris was ready to follow the lead of the provinces in demonstrations of Imperialist enthusiasm, and as the head of the State made his entry on horseback (accompanied, among others, by Nieuwerkerke in his capacity of colonel in command of the National Guards), he rode under triumphal arches bearing the

inscription "Napoleon III." Great was the emulation of those who had anything to gain to show their loyal sentiments. At the Opéra Français, Arsène Houssaye, who, as Viel-Castel scornfully notes, had pasted the walls of Paris in 1848 with a declaration that he had been the first to break open the doors of the Palais-Législatif, and to proclaim the democratic republic, now displayed the Imperial scutcheon, and had verses of his own composition recited by Rachel, who three years before had been singing the *Marseillaise* to vociferous applause.

The talk was all of the rewards and honours to come. The Princess Mathilde, her father and brother, were to be *Altesses Impériales*. She was to have a handsome annual pension, and a household presided over by the Baroness Talleyrand as grand-mistress. Prince Napoleon was to be recognised as heir-apparent. All the Bonapartes and their allies were to receive appropriate distinctions, and the supporters of the dynasty were to have their share of the spoils. If there had been a fever of anticipation after the *coup d'état*, that fever was much greater now. A few unpleasantnesses marred the general feeling of joy. A deputation from the Senate, calling on the Prince-President at Saint-Cloud to express their devotion to him, at the same time insisted on the dislike of the country for the thought that the succession to the Imperial throne would rest in the line of



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Jerome. Hearing of this, Jerome resigned the presidency of the Senate, and protested his desire to give up all his posts, though no one believed him to be sincere. The question of the future Emperor's marriage was much debated, especially as this might dispose of the claims of Jerome and his son.

Already Louis-Napoleon had met her on whom he was to bestow the title of Empress. It was variously stated that the Baron James de Rothschild, the Montijos' banker, first introduced Eugénie to the Prince-President; and that it was at the Princess Mathilde's house that they first made acquaintance. According to the latter version of the story, Louis-Napoleon, seeing a beautiful young woman surrounded by a crowd of admirers in the *salon* in the Rue de Courcelles, asked his cousin who she was. She was an Andalusian, he was told, and a newly arrived visitor in Paris. He requested an introduction, and at once began to show her much attention. What is certain is that when, in the week before the *plébiscite* which was to make him Emperor, the Prince-President entertained a party at the old palace of Fontainebleau, the guests included Eugénie and her mother, as well as the Princess Mathilde, Prince Napoleon, the British Ambassador, and many of the leading supporters of the Government. Again the attention received by the young Spanish beauty was marked. But the

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political excitement of the following week diverted men's thoughts from all else for a time.

The last entertainment given by the Princess Mathilde under the rule of the Republic was her house-warming on November 23. She had given up No. 10, Rue de Courcelles, and taken possession of No. 24 in the same street, the former *hôtel* of the exiled Queen Cristina of Spain. The Prince-President was there, very gay and amiable, secure no doubt in his forecast of the *plébiscite*, and was the first to light his cigarette in the vast marble winter-garden of his cousin's house. All the talk was of the things to come, and the hostess was assured of her splendid position as soon as President should become Emperor.

## CHAPTER VIII

### HER IMPERIAL HIGHNESS

THE Empire brought with it to the Princess Mathilde and her nearest of kin the rank of Imperial Highnesses, which was theirs alone—the other members of the family, whether Bonapartes, Murats, Bacciochis, or remoter relations, being merely Highnesses. A decree published in the *Moniteur* before the end of the year settled the succession on Jerome and his male posterity, in default of a son being born to the Emperor or his adoption of a son. And the Princess was accorded an annual grant of two hundred thousand francs, thus doubling her income. The formation of a small Court for her began, Viel-Castel noting with malicious pleasure the abounding jealousies with regard to this and the anxiety of Madame Desprez to be recognised as a *grande dame*.

Still greater jealousies, however, were now flourishing over a much more important position than that of the ladies-in-waiting to her Imperial Highness. Louis-Napoleon could no longer say, as he had said to Senators urging

him to marry a few months earlier, "I am not in a hurry." For Napoleon III., Emperor of the French, the matter was pressing. The story of the many negotiations has often been told, and need concern us here no more than in so far as the Princess Mathilde was brought into touch with it. The first grand social event after the establishment of the Empire was a house-party at Compiègne, which was a repetition on a more magnificent scale of the party at Fontainebleau. The Princess acted as the hostess for her cousin, who said to her: "My dear Mathilde, until there is an Empress you are the first here, and you will always be on my right hand." Prince Napoleon was there, so were the most prominent Bonapartists, civil and military, the foreign ambassadors, and the Countess of Montijo and her daughter. Eleven days were spent in dining, dancing, hunting; and in every entertainment Mlle. de Montijo was the observed of all eyes, since it was so clear she monopolised the Emperor's glances. When the party broke up, near the end of the year, Morny went back to Paris declaring, "She will be Empress!" while old Jerome observed in alarm to the Baroness Talleyrand: "But, my dear Baroness, this marriage will injure my son's right to the succession!"

On January 9 the Princess Mathilde gave a ball in the Rue de Courcelles, at which the Emperor and Eugénie de Montijo were both

present. They were observed to have over an hour's undisturbed conversation together during the ball, and Eugénie was treated as the rising star by the Ministers and all desirous of winning Napoleon's favour. Only some of the women showed ill-humour at the idea of having to call the Spaniard "Your Majesty." A week before this, if the usually accepted dates are correct, Napoleon had received from the Princess Adelaide of Hohenlohe, who was staying with her aunt, Queen Victoria, in England, a polite refusal of his offer of marriage. He had decided to follow the promptings of his heart. Three days after his cousin's entertainment he gave a State ball at the Tuileries, where his dancing with Eugénie was so much noticed that their engagement was already widely proclaimed as a fact. It was not until January 17, however, that he made a formal announcement in Council, nor until the 19th that this was definitely repeated in the Press.

It is said that Napoleon gave the first private warning of his intention to his cousin Mathilde, who so heartily disapproved that she fell on her knees before him and implored him not to lower himself thus in the public estimation. This may be true; but we can hardly believe that the Princess knew of the scheme on the night of her ball, nor yet on the following day, when there was a very lively dinner-party at her house. Viel-Castel was a guest at the

dinner, and reports the free discussion of much scandal, in which the mistress of the house took her share. Had she known for certain then that Eugénie was to have the offer of becoming Empress, she could not have kept the knowledge to herself. Her natural frankness, and her indignation over the misalliance, must have forced her to betray the secret.

But since Napoleon's mind was fully made up—and, if he would not listen to his favourite cousin, he was certainly not likely to be advised by any one else—it only remained for the Princess Mathilde to perform the duties which he asked of her through her position in the family. On the evening of January 29 the civil marriage took place in the Salle des Maréchaux at the Tuileries, to which Eugénie made her progress amid stately ceremonial. She was received, on her arrival at the foot of the staircase, by the Duke of Bassano, Grand Chamberlain; at the entrance to the first saloon by the Princess Mathilde and Prince Napoleon; and finally, in the family saloon, by the Emperor, supported by princes, princesses, and religious, civil, military, and naval dignitaries. Henry Greville, in his *Diary*, reports, on the authority of an eye-witness, that when the time came for the signature of the famous family register of the Bonapartes, "nothing could be more diverting than the manner of the different witnesses as they came up to sign their name." Jerome

"bowed as he passed the Emperor, but took no notice of *her*." As for his son, "the Republican Prince bowed to neither one nor the other."

Of the Princess Mathilde's behaviour on this occasion we are not told; but on the following day, that of the religious ceremony, she felt compelled to assert herself. Greville's informant recounts that one of the various marks of ill-humour shown by some members of the family was "the positive refusal of the Princess Mathilde to go in the same carriage with her father and brother, both of whom she abhors. It was then proposed that she should share a carriage with the Montijos, whom she equally detests; but at last she succeeded in having a carriage to herself." It must be remembered that the quarrel between Jerome and his daughter was still in progress. What reason the Princess had for "detesting" the Countess of Montijo we do not know, but she might well claim that her rank entitled her to a different carriage.

A few days after the wedding there was a dinner at the Tuilleries, at which the Princess Mathilde was present. She sat at the Emperor's right at the table, Lady Douglas (who is also said to have remonstrated against the Montijo marriage) on his left. Napoleon is reported to have turned first to his right, saying: "Mathilde, had you wished it, you might have been here now." Then turning to the left, he added:

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"And you, Marie, it seems to me, would not have been out of place here, either."<sup>1</sup>

At least one other member of the Imperial family thought that she might have sat in Eugénie's place. If we can believe the Princess Caroline Murat, there was a letter written by Napoleon's former mistress, Miss H., in which she said: "Hasn't she been a little fool to marry Chassiron? If she had willed it, I myself should have made of her—who knows?—perhaps a future Empress." We have, however, no other suggestion of Napoleon's regard for Caroline Murat, before or after she "danced herself into an engagement," as she herself writes, with the Baron de Chassiron. The Baron only succeeded, through her influence, in procuring for himself the petty post of *maître des requêtes*, and neither of them figured at all prominently at Court, though Caroline's younger sister Anna, afterwards Duchess of Mouchy, became one of the dearest friends of the Empress Eugénie.

In the case of Mathilde there is no doubt that she might really, had she wished it, have been mistress of the Tuilleries—a fact which helps to explain why she and the Empress never became cordial friends. There were a few brief periods in their lives when they drew close together, but

<sup>1</sup> M. F. Loliée states that he had this story from the lips of the Countess Walewska, who was present on the occasion (*Les Femmes du Second Empire, Papiers intimes*, p. 92).

for the most part they remained far separated. They were, indeed, of natures unsympathetic to each other. Eugénie's "Spanish piety" neither tolerated nor was understood by Mathilde's blend of Sunday prayers and weekday scepticism, if we may so describe the Princess's attitude towards religion. In foreign politics they were always ranged on opposite sides, the one's love, and the other's hatred, of the Vatican being dominant principles. Later we find the Empress a friend of Britain (she had her Scottish ancestry as part-motive), while the Princess detested the country to whom the exile of Saint Helena owed his mournful death. In home affairs Mathilde, as a rule, interested herself but little, whereas Eugénie followed every question in the newspapers and asked nothing better than to have a voice in their solution. Art was half of life to Mathilde; with Eugénie it counted little. In appreciation of literature they differed widely, and neither was always wrong in her judgment; but the Princess was a genuine admirer of great writers as such, and a generous supporter of them in time of need. The Empress's charity was large, and of a very personal quality; she would interest herself in a case, and herself visit those who sent in petitions for assistance, while hospitals, homes, etc., received big subscriptions from her regularly. The Princess, on her part, never had a letter from one in her enormous circle of dis-

tinguished men, begging a favour for a *protégé*, to which she did not make an immediate response; and she lavished gifts in season on her friends, great and small. She did not, however, fall behind the Empress in public charities, considering the difference in their positions. Her principal care was the Asile Mathilde, which she founded at Neuilly in 1853 for three hundred incurable girls and supported nobly to the end of her life.

Both had a full capacity for social enjoyment, but they interpreted the words very diversely. The Empress liked the gay frivolity of a Court, dancing and dressing itself with the aid of a certain amount of brains; the Princess liked the intellectual sparkle of a *salon*, not without a background of good looks and fine clothes. Mathilde was luckier than Eugénie, for she attained much more nearly to her idea of a *salon* than the other to hers of a Court. Etiquette killed much of the gaiety of the Tuilleries, and even of Saint-Cloud and Compiègne,<sup>1</sup> so that to the Princess their atmosphere seemed dull when she entered it. "It is strange how pleased I am to get away from these places," she exclaimed once. "I am ill at ease at

<sup>1</sup> A curious reminiscence of the Princess's about a visit to Compiègne is preserved. She was rather luxurious in the matter of beds, and did not like the one assigned to her at the château, which had been the Pope's. "How unhappy I was! A bed so big that you couldn't imagine it! To keep warm I was obliged to heap all my wardrobe on myself."

Court. The sentiments and the talk are so different there. I can't explain it, but I feel quite another person, and I am in a hurry to get back to myself and my home." It is said that at the Tuileries sometimes the Empress, sitting on her *fauteuil*, hedged about with state and watching the Princess vivaciously talking and laughing with whom she pleased, would two or three times in the course of an evening send a chamberlain to invite her to come and sit by her—to put a check upon her gaiety. Eugénie was but a rare visitor to the Rue de Courcelles. Had she been present on many occasions which have been described for posterity by the memoirists, she would certainly have considered the conversation outrageous rather than entertaining. She has been accused of envying her husband's cousin her social power in Paris. But they were the leaders in two different worlds. The Court world revolved round woman, for the distraction of the Emperor, his wife claimed; that of the Rue de Courcelles round man, for the entertainment of the hostess, as she made no attempt to deny.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE INNER CIRCLE

THE Emperor's marriage made a considerable difference in the Princess Mathilde's life, if only for the reason that it relieved her of the necessity of doing the honours of her cousin's palace when he entertained. The lack of understanding between her and the Empress had the natural result that the Princess to a large extent dropped out of Court life, being seldom invited when conventional politeness did not necessitate an invitation to the Tuilleries or Saint-Cloud. As we know, this gave her small sorrow. She had the more time to devote to her art and her friends. Her doubled income furnished her with the means of entertaining more lavishly than before, but she made no change in the quality of her guests or the general disposition of her days. Her domestic interior remained the same, and it is time now to look at the little circle which surrounded her in her home. Of Nieuwerkerke and Madame Desprez we have already heard; the others have been no more than names hitherto.

Prominent for a great many years of the Princess's life, both in Paris and in the country, was Eugène Giraud, her master in water-colour painting. His brother Charles, and later his son Victor, were constant visitors at the Princess's, but Eugène scarcely left her side throughout the day. He was a true Bohemian, whose influence over his patron Viel-Castel bitterly deplores. The Girauds and Madame Desprez surround the poor Princess with a vulgar, democratic crowd, he complains, and while she thinks she has a *salon* she has really only a bazaar, in which every flatterer lives at the expense of his audience. She has been so far corrupted in manners that she mistakes familiarity for ease, taps Giraud on the shoulder, calls him "*Ma vieille Giraille!*" and swears that he is hers, her very own, to be lent to nobody else. The Princess did (as we know from the Goncourts' journal) call him *Giraille*, and she did object to his painting pictures for people of whom she disapproved. But she was an old friend and a very generous patron, and her air of affectionate proprietorship was surely harmless enough. As for the society he introduced to her, it included the elder and the younger Dumas, and numerous others who were not so despised by all as by Viel-Castel. Nor was Giraud fairly to be classed with the flatterers. He used to put forth his opinions roundly in the Princess's presence and speak the truth under the cover of raillery.

Giraud was certainly an original character. He had a room in the Princess's house, to which the male visitors were wont to retire when their hostess had bidden them good-night, to talk and tell stories, or to look through his album of caricatures, until 2 a.m. Madame Giraud was meanwhile slumbering peacefully at home, having retired to bed at eight. When her husband and son came back in the early hours of the morning, they joined her in her room—Eugène sleeping on a sofa beside her bed, Victor on a folding-bed at their feet—and Victor would read aloud from one of the many odd volumes lying about the room, which had been picked up by the old lady in some second-hand shop, regardless of whether they were complete or not. Then the men would talk and smoke for an hour or so more. Madame rose early, made the coffee, and then left them to their repose.

Through his connection with the Princess Giraud did very well for himself. In fact the whole family benefited, for the son and the uncle also received annual commissions from Nieuwerkerke. In the early sixties Eugène Giraud had two houses of his own, one in Paris and one at Saint-Gratien, in the latter of which he hardly ever lived. Yet Viel-Castel says that he was always complaining, dressed shabbily, and insisted on travelling third-class.

The same critic has a very strong objection to another of those whom he accuses of lowering

the tone of the Princess's circle—Alfred Arago, one of the sons of the great astronomer. "He is not a regular inmate of the house; but he is always there, and is the buffoon of the establishment, vulgar and familiar, always spoiling conversation with his jokes."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, "he is incessantly kissing the Princess's arms and hands, leaving to his lieutenants the duty of kissing the arms and shoulders of the ladies who form the Princess's intimate circle." His family have spread a false rumour that he is the Princess's lover, and he has done nothing to contradict it. A brother, a bad painter and a bad character at the same time, is a client and friend of Prince Napoleon, and Viel-Castel looks on Alfred Arago as no better than a spy on the Princess Mathilde in the interests of her brother.

Another constant visitor is the only cleric of the Princess's intimate acquaintance, the Abbé Coquereau. He had been almoner to the naval division which, under the Monarchy, brought back Napoleon's ashes to France, and was now chief almoner to the fleet. To the author of the *cahiers noirs* the Abbé is an intriguer and sycophant, who pretends to a frankness which is not really his. In speech, at least, he is very

<sup>1</sup> Jules de Goncourt records a morning call upon the Princess in December 1867. She is at private Mass in another room, and the sounds of the Mass are punctuated by Arago's chaff in the room where the visitors are waiting.

gallant towards the ladies. Among men he affects to be very tolerant. There is really nothing of the priest about him except his habit, and his only thought is ambition. While he aspires to be *Monseigneur*—“the violet stockings would become him so well!”—he speaks lightly of the Vatican and his fellow-priests. The Princess, who calls him “the good Abbé,” doubtless singles him out among the clergy for her friendship because of this trait in his character. She can abuse priests, cardinals, and Pope without fear before him. At the same time she can see through him partly. Having him to dinner one night at her house with the head of the Ministry of Religion, she is amused at Coquereau’s persistent court to the great man, and remarks to him as he is leaving: “Confess now, my dear Abbé, if any one else were to act as you have done for the last four hours, you would look upon him as a schemer!” But Coquereau gets himself driven back to Paris by the Minister, and ultimately becomes a canon of Saint-Denis.

An equally unpleasant intriguer in Viel-Castel’s eyes is Eudore Soulié, who is, like himself, a keeper of the Louvre. The father-in-law of the dramatist Sardou, Soulié is much liked by the Princess, but his colleague calls him ferretty, deceitful—and republican.

The Reiset family would seem to have deserved the strictures of Viel-Castel more than

others of the circle. There had been a time when Reiset the father, one of the keepers of the Louvre, had hoped the Princess would not come to live near him at Saint-Gratien, because it would be unpleasant for his wife and daughter to be contaminated by her neighbourhood. But soon the whole family is very intimate with her, and Madame, who was once shocked at anything, now listens to every jest without wincing. The daughter Marie is pretty and coquettish, refusing all suitors until the Comte de Ségur comes along. She marries him, and the Princess's influence is besought to get him some post. The Emperor refuses him as a chamberlain. Nevertheless, the Reisets are very puffed up, and still more so when the father is appointed keeper of drawings at the Louvre. His pomposity and laying down of the law weary the kind-hearted Princess, and the family at last go out of favour with her.<sup>1</sup>

Of one of the Reisets, a kinsman with a Royalist title of Count, the Princess tells a story. He had once been a lover of Madame

<sup>1</sup> It is but fair to Reiset to add that M. Frédéric Masson pays a handsome tribute to his good influence over the Princess, whom he calls happy in having found in him a keeper of her artistic conscience. "M. Frédéric Reiset," he says, "was one of those rare men who bring to the appreciation of the world of art an inborn taste, and at the same time a scientific knowledge, built up by comparative studies; one of those who, if they make a mistake occasionally in the attribution of a picture, never make one in the estimation of a work of art" (*Jadis*, chapter on the Princess Mathilde).

de Robilaud, ex-mistress of King Charles-Albert of Savoy. After this he tried to interest the Princess Mathilde in his scheme of a marriage with a left-hand daughter of her uncle Paul of Würtemburg, hoping to get a princely title along with her from Stuttgart. Then he made love to the Princess herself, who treated the affair as a joke to avoid seeming offended. As he persisted, however, she said at last : " Monsieur de Reiset, I am no longer a young woman, and I am not ambitious, but I don't yet feel decrepit enough to take Madame de Robilaud's place." Reiset retired crestfallen, and later consoled himself by marrying one of her ladies-in-waiting, Mademoiselle de Sancy.

It was inevitable that Mathilde, with her warm-hearted and impulsive nature, should pitch at times upon unworthy favourites, attracted to her only by her great wealth and well-known generosity. But the picture which represents her as constantly surrounded by a miserable gang of toadies, uniting together to secure some common end or else backbiting one another to their utmost, is entirely at variance with the observations of the vast majority of those who came in contact with her. She made mistakes at times, as she was bound to admit herself. In the spring of 1856 she at last abandoned all faith in Madame Desprez and her daughter, and dismissed her reader with a small pension. It is said that when she

informed the Emperor and Empress of this step, they both congratulated her, and told her they had long hesitated as to whether they should not warn her of the harm both mother and daughter were doing her. Madame Desprez's offence was the continual betrayal and misrepresentation outside—which is equivalent to saying in Court circles—of the Princess's private life.<sup>1</sup>

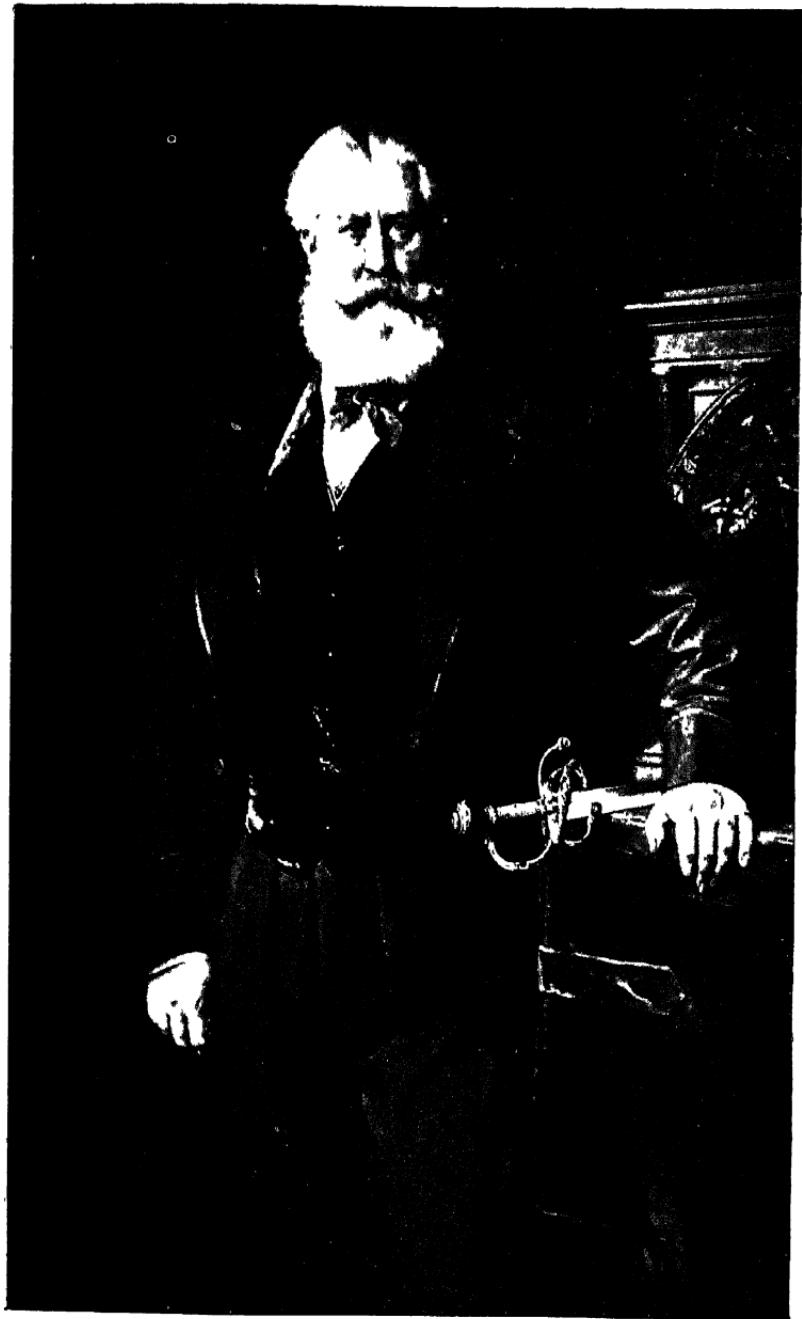
There was, indeed, little to be told except with regard to the Nieuwerkerke connection, and one might have thought that the flagrant indiscretion of that left no work for a spy to do. The Princess's new rank and grant caused no alteration in her behaviour. For the summer succeeding the Imperial marriage she went to Breteuil. Achille Fould, the Minister of State, had attempted to secure this residence for himself, but Napoleon refused to disappoint his cousin, so that for July, August, and September, she was allowed to set up her establishment within view of Saint-Cloud. Viel-Castel's comment is worth quotation :

“ I feel certain that she and Nieuwerkerke are blind as to the feelings of the Emperor and Empress towards them. The Emperor plainly regards their connection with displeasure. One of these days the Imperial dissatisfaction will take the shape in words and actions which I

<sup>1</sup> Almost as great an enormity, in Viel-Castel's eyes, was her warm advocacy of Georges Sand.

dread for them. I think they have been imprudent in coming to live at Breteuil. The premonitory signs of a disgrace show on the horizon. The Princess's receptions are less frequented. The officers of the Imperial household and the Empress's ladies have been *advised* not to go there. The Empress has paid but one visit, the Duchess of Alba has not even sent a card. But, as always happens, the interested parties see nothing and behave with singular imprudence. Nieuwerkerke believes in his star. He is accustomed to high favour and will not open his eyes. He lives at Breteuil with his valet; his horses and grooms share the quarters of the Princess's horses and grooms. He walks about with her in the park of Saint-Cloud, under the Emperor's very eyes, brazens everything out, and is quite confident about his future. . . . The Princess never conceals the *liaison*. She speaks of Nieuwerkerke as a woman would speak of her husband. Everyone knows that they lodge in the same suite of apartments, and when the Princess receives, Nieuwerkerke appears in the drawing-room without his hat."

Nieuwerkerke, according to his subordinate at the Louvre, had really no passion, nor anything like one, for the Princess, and was at this <sup>\*</sup> very time intriguing with some one else. But of her love for Nieuwerkerke there could be no doubt. A letter of hers, calmly read by the



COUNT NIEUWERKERKE.



recipient to Viel-Castel, was sufficient proof of this. And any slight to him stung her deeply. When the Duchess of Alba at last paid a call at Breteuil, knowing Nieuwerkerke to be absent at the time, the Princess merely sent down word that she was not receiving. Later in the year, when the committee was appointed for the coming Exposition Universelle, and Nieuwerkerke, in spite of his official position, had no place on it, the Princess told Fould, in the presence of witnesses in her own drawing-room, that she looked on the omission as a personal insult to herself, that it would be said all over Europe that this was because Nieuwerkerke was her lover, that she refused to be treated so, that she had no need of the beggarly two hundred thousand francs which the Government gave her, and that if, at the instigation of her scoundrelly father and brother, she was to be dealt with like this, she would go to a country where the sovereign considered her a member of his family and acted towards her as such. "Go and tell this to the Emperor," she cried, "or else I will go and tell him myself, and more forcibly too!"

The Princess was right in her assumption of the enmity towards Nieuwerkerke of the Palais-Royal, now the home of Jerome and Prince Napoleon; the error which she made was not to recognise that there were a great many other enemies too, including some in her own house-

hold. It took her, and Nieuwerkerke also, more than another two years to find out the falseness of Madame Desprez, for instance.

Nieuwerkerke, indeed, obstinately refused to be enlightened. Sincere in his loyalty to the Emperor (even his ever-carping subordinate admits this), he persisted in believing that Napoleon looked very favourably upon him, in spite of the scandal which he brought upon the Princess Mathilde. Count Bacciochi, of the Imperial household, made several attempts to warn him of the real state of affairs, but he would not take a hint. The Empress's coldness towards him was equally ineffectual. Nor did the remarks of the crowd at public ceremonies reach his ears, accusing him of being kept by the Princess—as was practically the case, for he had seldom to spend a penny in her company. It scarcely makes matters better that he was in no want of money, with his handsome salary and his lodgings at the Louvre. The Princess had at least an excuse for her blindness in her infatuation. Unless Nieuwerkerke has been grossly wronged, that excuse did not exist in his case, and the least damning interpretation which can be put on his conduct is that it was a sublime conceit which permitted him to act as he did.

## CHAPTER X

### RACIAL PREJUDICES

WE have heard of the reasons which bound the daughter of Catherine of Würtemburg and the wife of Anatole Demidoff in close sympathy with the ruler of Russia. Early in the new reign the policy of France took a turn very distasteful to the Princess Mathilde. Her house was always a great centre for Russians visiting France, and many a beauty from the north made her first bow to Parisian society there. In June 1853, the prospect of a war with Russia began to be an anxiously debated question in the Rue de Courcelles. The Princess, who had a few months before received a most friendly letter from the Tsar, congratulating her on her new honours,<sup>1</sup> energetically defended Russia's

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, when writing his sketch of her character, was permitted by the Princess to quote both this letter of January 10, 1853, and the later one, quoted below. Nicholas now wrote :

"It was a great pleasure, my dear niece, to receive your kind letter. The sentiments shown are as honourable to you as they are agreeable to me. Since, as you say, the recent good fortune of France has brought its share to you, you must enjoy the favours bestowed upon you ; they could not come to any one more grateful than you are. I am charmed to have been able to give you my support in the past. In place of the protection of which you have no longer need, you may be sure of one thing from me, the affection which I bear you."

conduct with regard to the "Holy places" and denied her designs upon Constantinople. Nicholas had no political intention, she affirmed. What could be more natural than the Russian championship of the claims of the Orthodox Church to the shrines? As for France's traditional protection of the Roman Catholics—"Why mix ourselves up in these things?" she asked.

As time went on and war drew nearer, her Russian sympathies became stronger still. The French understanding with Britain stirred her deep anger, and, regardless of the attitude of her country, she wrote on New Year's Day a letter conveying to Nicholas the feelings of her heart. On February 9 the Tsar replied:

"I thank you sincerely, my dear niece, for the noble sentiments which your letter expresses towards me. A heart like yours is incapable of changing in accordance with the accidents of politics. I knew this; but at the present moment I could not but feel particular satisfaction over the kind and friendly words which reached me from a country where lately Russia and her Sovereign have been constantly the objects of the most hateful accusations. Like yourself I deplore the recent suspension of good relations between Russia and France, in spite of all the efforts I have made to open the way to a friendly understanding. On the arrival of the Empire in France I ventured to hope that this restoration need not inevitably bring in its

train a rivalry with Russia and an armed conflict between the two countries. Heaven grant that the storm now ready to burst may still blow over! Is Europe again destined, after an interval of more than forty years, to witness a repetition of the same sanguinary dramas? What will be the outcome of them this time? It is not given to human foresight to guess; but I can assure you of this, my dear niece, that in no possible event can I cease to have for you the affectionate feelings which I have declared before."

This letter was personally delivered to the Princess by the Russian Consul-General in Paris, and strengthened her in her views. War having actually broken out, she was very bitter against her cousin Napoleon, while anything connected with England was bad in her eyes.<sup>1</sup> The death of Nicholas made no difference. "She is more flattered," reports Viel-Castel, "at being, through her mother, cousin to the Emperor of Russia than at being the cousin-german of the Emperor of the French. The new Emperor of Russia has just written to her that the dearest legacy to him from his father is the duty of cherishing the love which the late Tsar had towards her." She is pleased and proud about this letter, and news about the war, unfavourable to the Allies, is rife in her circle.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Viel-Castel, *Mémoires*, February 28, September 18, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, May 25, 1855.

On this question of policy in the Near East the Princess Mathilde was directly opposed to Napoleon III. In the other chief question of foreign politics which aroused her feelings she found him, if at first secretly, ranged on the same side as herself. Both of them had preserved from their early days in Italy a love of the cause of Italian freedom—freedom not only from Austrian, but also from Papal, rule. She saw no reason to disguise her attitude. Already in 1854 she was talking of the possibility of a French invasion of Italy and of the pleasure she would take in a revolution against the existing authorities there. She had five years to wait for the gratification of her desires. In January 1859, Viel-Castel tells of the great rejoicing in the Princess's drawing-room over Napoleon's New Year Day speech to the Austrian Ambassador. This was the period of the greatest harmony between Mathilde, her brother, and the Emperor. The children of Jerome, however, went further than their cousin, to whom the retention of a French garrison at Rome was an unfair protection of the Pope against the aspirations of the Italian people. The Rue de Courcelles became a hotbed of the *Italianissimes*, and any one who did not agree with them was eyed askance. And the Princess carried her principles down to the country with her, too. "A few days ago," writes Mérimée to his friend Panizzi in London,

on July 11, 1862, "the Princess Mathilde was imprudent enough to go to Mass at Saint-Gratien, where she has a country house. The *curé* took it into his head to offer up an impromptu prayer that God would open the eyes of the great ones of the earth and inspire them not to persecute the Vicar of Jesus Christ. The Princess got up in a rage and walked straight out of the church, and, to make matters still better, the whole congregation followed her, leaving the *curé* all alone with the verger."

"The Princess Mathilde thinks herself a Liberal and a lover of free discussion, but she takes a dislike to all those who do not agree with her." So exclaims Viel-Castel, who is strongly pro-papal and hates the Princess's Italian friends, the "demagogic nonentities," the "little atheists or unbelievers." He has many criticisms, throughout the *Mémoires*, of the Princess's religious attitude—mumbling prayers in the morning, and in the evening smiling at calumnies against the priesthood, nay worse, herself speaking recklessly against priests, cardinals, and Pope, using "Jesuit" as a term of abuse, furious over the inclusion of Cardinal Morlot in the Council of Regency in 1858, tolerating no cleric except the double-faced Coquereau, and that because he rails at all of his cloth, up to the Pope.

We cannot help feeling that there is some

basis for this complaint against the Princess, who was inconsistent in her attempt to combine pious observance and hostility to all clericalism. Her brain appears to have followed her brother Napoleon's, her heart to have remained behind. She felt most at ease in the society of sceptics, yet she must have her private chapel and her daily mass. In the sphere of foreign politics her anti-clericalism prevailed. France at the beginning of the quarrel with Russia was espousing the claims of Rome and was therefore wrong. France in taking up the cause of a free Italy was combating the claims of Rome and was therefore right. No doubt, also, she liked Russians as Russians, and Italians as Italians, and allowed herself to be influenced by her Russian friends, the Ratomskis, in one instance,<sup>1</sup> and by her Italian friends, especially the Vimercatis, in the other. "Poor Princess," writes Viel-Castel in April, 1862, "she does not understand that she is only a marionette in Vimercati's hands." Later in the same year he reports having heard Benedetti—then French Minister at the Court of Turin, and a lifelong friend of the Princess—advising Vimercati, in the *salon* of the Rue de Courcelles, to tell Victor Emmanuel that he had only to march

<sup>1</sup> As a supporter of Italian freedom she might have been expected to favour Polish freedom, too, especially as it was an idea with which the Bonapartes were fond of coquetting. But the Ratomskis are said to have made her detest the Poles.

three hundred thousand unarmed Italians into Rome, when the French troops would retire unresisting.

The Princess Mathilde's love of Italy continued to the end of her days. "I am homesick for Florence," she would sometimes say. She visited the country periodically, her last visit being made in 1891, when she was over eighty, and her brother was lying on his deathbed in Rome. Italians were among the most welcome guests at her later *salon* in the Rue de Berri. Her favourite relatives of the younger generation were Italians, Prince Placido Gabrielli,<sup>1</sup> and the brothers Giuseppe and Luigi Primoli,<sup>2</sup> all descendants of Lucien Bonaparte. In return, the Italians were among her warmest admirers, no one writing of her more enthusiastically on her death than Baron Lumbroso and the novelist Mathilde Serao.

Those who carped at the Princess's *salon* often made its "exotic" character a ground for reproach. Viel-Castel calls her "not quite French"; and of course this was strictly true, inasmuch as her Bonaparte grandparents were Corsicans, of Italian origin, and her mother's

<sup>1</sup> Known at Saint-Gratien as "Prince Charming," says Jules de Goncourt. He was the only surviving son of Mario Gabrielli and Christine-Charlotte Bonaparte, Lucien's eldest daughter. He married at the Tuileries, in 1856, his cousin Auguste, daughter of Charles Bonaparte, Prince of Canino, of whom we have heard above.

<sup>2</sup> Sons of Count Pietro Primoli and Charlotte Bonaparte, another daughter of the Prince of Canino.

family partly German and partly English, or at least Hanoverian. It was, therefore, but natural that she should have wide sympathies in the matter of race. But it has already been mentioned that she did not include the English among those whom she liked. This prejudice continued as she grew older. In the Princess Caroline Murat's *Memoirs*, Mathilde's visit to England for the funeral of Napoleon III. is described. She was "very cross and very sorry for herself. She had always hated England." As we know, it was her worship of her great uncle that made her nourish this dislike of those who kept him captive at Saint Helena.

Nevertheless, however mixed her own descent, and however wide her sympathies with foreigners—there was even a Japanese among her frequent visitors in the Rue de Berri—the Princess Mathilde may assuredly be called at heart a French woman. If she did not become one in fact until after she had left girlhood behind, she had been trained at least to think in French from the beginning, and she grew passionately patriotic when she made France her home. The Empire's ruin in 1870, keenly as it affected her, did not cure her of her love. Homesick for Paris, she returned from exile in less than a year, to share the joys and sorrows of France until death came upon her.

No better idea can be gathered of what her country meant to her than from some remarks

which she made to the guests in her house in the Rue de Berri one day in 1876. When she left France, she said, it was as though something closed inside her head, as though a shutter went up. At Bâle once, on her way to Italy, a terrible headache compelled her to go to bed while the rest of her party were dining. As she lay there a violent temptation came upon her to get up and fly to the station, leaving the others to go on alone. "I need Paris, its pavements, its quays, with all those lights at night. There are days when I am happy just to be living here. When I am away from France I have the very devil in me to come back, to be here, to find myself among French people. The first time that I set foot on French soil, in August 1841, at two in the morning, as soon as I saw a 'red-leg' [*i.e.*, a French soldier] I couldn't help it, I got out of the carriage to embrace him. Yes, I actually embraced him!"

What could be a surer mark of the good French man or woman than such love of Paris as is shown by the Princess here?

## CHAPTER XI

### THE HOSTESS

It has been mentioned that in 1849 the Princess Mathilde visited the château of Saint-Gratien at Enghien, fell in love with it, and determined to become its mistress; and also that in 1851 she carried out her intention. In June of the latter year she began her famous house-parties, which she continued during the summer months as long as she lived. In 1852-3 her summer holidays were chiefly spent at Breteuil, but in 1854 she was definitely established at Saint-Gratien, and from that time onwards only the Franco-Prussian War interrupted her visits.

The château of Saint-Gratien had been originally built for the Comte de Lucay under the First Empire. When the Princess took it in 1851, she hired it from the Marquis de Custine. Fifteen years later she narrated to Jules de Goncourt and other guests, as they helped her to stake out the ground for a new winter-garden there, how she had at first only the château and eighteen acres, how she extended the estate to eighty-two acres, how she bought up the neighbouring pavilion of Catinat, and how she

was still planning to round off her property. The elder Goncourt<sup>1</sup> gives an elaborate account of what he describes as having been during the Empire "the charming home of the government of art and literature, the gracious ministry of the graces."

The great feature of Saint-Gratien is the studio, which is built on as an annexe to the *salon* on the right side of the house, and communicates with it by a little corridor crowded with furniture of inlaid wood, lacquer cabinets, mother-of-pearl and tortoiseshell-topped tables, brilliant with the flash of copper bowls and the plumage of exotic birds. At the studio door stands a green-and-blue enamelled fountain, to wash the stains of work away, and draperies from China and Morocco hang at the entrance. Inside, on the right, in the bay of a blocked-up window stands a little green-and-white striped sofa, over which are displayed the medals and diplomas gained by the Princess at various exhibitions. On the window-ledge is a large photograph of the Prince Imperial—Goncourt is writing in 1874—and on the sides of the bay a cabinet of huge blue Brazilian butterflies and a photograph of one of Victor Giraud's pictures, "The Charmer."

The window of the studio which looks out on Catinat is choked with furniture and vases, in the profusion beloved by the Princess. Two

<sup>1</sup> *Journal*, November 14, 1874.

inlaid tables bear, one a porcelain basket, the other a vase of Imperial yellow, with a palm-branch in it. Between the table is a huge divan, covered in the same sea-green chintz with pink-and-blue flowers, which hangs on the walls and decorates the ceiling. On this part of the floor is a great Persian rug, purple in hue, with little white dots over it which remind Goncourt of bits of paper scattered everywhere. In front of the divan stand an esparto chair, the Princess's tapestry work, and a wicker basket adorned with knots and bows, in which she keeps her silks. On this chair she sits when she turns from painting to her more feminine occupation: and on the divan she throws herself at twilight for her melancholy reverie over the past. (Again we must remember that this was written in 1874.) Close at hand is the dogs' basket, where they sleep near the stove which warms also their mistress's feet.

Against the wall opposite the entrance is an immense Dutch inlaid cabinet, surmounted by silver vases, in which stand open Japanese parasols. Next this is a Louis-Quinze writing-table, carrying a white morocco blotting-case with a gilt M in relief, a copper inkpot with a silver eagle on it, a sandal-wood paper-knife encrusted with mother-of-pearl, etc., and a small bronze-bust of Napoleon I. between two bunches of artificial violets.

In this wall is the outer door, which leads to the lake. In front of it are a vase of blood-red jasper, containing a tree-fern, and another of blue glass, full of chrysanthemums, whose hues stand out against the fern. On a little table near by are a red morocco album, in which are portraits of Popelin, Coquereau, the Benedettis, the Girauds; a photograph of Rousseau's "Fête-Dieu" in a lacquer frame; an ivory pocket-mirror, a case of scissors, a little leather bag, a pin-cushion, a pair of charcoal-soiled gloves, a glass half-full of lemonade, a folded veil, and a pot of sage-lotion for sore gums! Goncourt's eye and pen do not miss one mark of the artistic temperament.

On the other side of the door is another piece of Dutch furniture, a chest, on the top of which stand two peacocks with outspread tails, between them a cupid holding a mirror, and behind two gilt harps with fine Louis-Seize carving. Then come a welter of tables and stools, a dressing-table littered with rolls of coloured paper, an easel with a water-colour on it, a rocking-chair, and a bookcase full of reference-books.

The only two large pictures in the studio hang beside the door, both representing peacocks, one by Philippe Rousseau, the other by Monginot. The Princess's admiration of the peacock is worthy of note.

The side of the studio which faces the garden

is that reserved specially for the artist. A green blind covers the great window and affords a shade. A divan is in the centre, for the reader when there is reading aloud. The Princess works in a corner, where are all her materials, to be touched by no one's hands but hers. Over her head hangs a cartel-clock, and the angle behind her is a regular shrine decorated with Hébert's drawings. Against the wall as far as the entrance-door, and covering it to the height of the ceiling, are such objects as ostrich-eggs with pearl pendants, Venetian lamps, Eastern water-coolers, barbaric musical instruments, and huge palm-branches, a gift from the Pope. Among these can be described photographs of Napoleon III. at various periods of his life, comic sketches by Giraud, old prints of the first Emperor, a case of stuffed humming-birds, and where the door of some cupboard gapes open one catches a glimpse of albums, painting-blocks, brushes, tubes, crayons, bottles of coloured ink, all the paraphernalia of the Princess as an artist.

Goncourt's description is much longer and more elaborate than this, but perhaps we have given enough to convey an idea of the centre of life at Saint-Gratien—for to the Princess Mathilde the ideal abode is an enormous studio surrounded by *maisonettes* for a colony of a dozen friends, "a sort of phalanstery," as she once expressed it, "where one can live

with those one likes to the end of one's days." As *Notre-Dame de Saint-Gratien* she succeeded to some extent, if not enough to satisfy her generous heart, in carrying out her ideas.

The daily life at Saint-Gratien is graphically described by many of the visitors privileged to spend holidays there. Viel-Castel, who had a standing invitation two days every week during the summer, and availed himself of it with regularity, is chiefly concerned, as might be supposed, with the characters of his fellow guests. On his first visit he remarks how one meets all kinds of people there. In July 1855, he complains of the Bohemians with whom Madame Desprez and Eugène Giraud try to surround the poor kind Princess—for instance, the elder Dumas. Two years later he finds her household made up of "secret enemies, vile flatterers, and buffoons." Nieuwerkerke is always there, giving himself the airs of master of the place, but it is the Girauds who run it, especially Eugène, with whom the Princess spends all her day painting. As the writer's spleen grows worse, he sees his hostess under the thumb of her *femme de chambre* Julie, whose husband is the butler and enriches himself while serving up detestable dinners and bad wines.

Jules de Goncourt furnishes an excellent corrective to this ungrateful visitor's grumbling, and it is difficult to choose among his many

pictures of the pleasant days at the château. We may see the arrival, in August 1865, of a string of carriages at the gates, bringing the Goncourts, Nieuwerkerke, Giraud and his curly-headed mephistophelean son, Alfred Arago, Eudore Soulié, and the Primolis. Breakfast awaits them, after which Eugène Giraud starts upon caricatures, the Princess sitting on the arm of his chair, looking over his head, and laughing the first as she recognises the victim portrayed. Then all go off to Lake Enghien and the boat-house at the water's edge, smothered in climbing plants. The party divides up and puts off in the fleet of canoes across the lake. Coming back to the château they find awaiting them the two latest artists to receive the Legion of Honour, to whom the Princess had telegraphed to join them. She bestows upon them both the little diamond cross which it is her custom to give to those decorated through her influence, and at dinner seats them on her right hand and her left. After the meal Giraud's albums are inspected, with their sketches of the Princess embracing her dog Chine, while she poses for her bust by Carpeaux; of the Abbé Coquereau, an imaginary back-view, dressed in baby's short drawers; and of various other members of the circle.

The next day the ordinary routine of the visit begins, the Princess painting for two hours

after breakfast, assisted by Giraud and her second teacher, Hébert. The guests talk, read, or paint, as they like, scattered about the *atelier*. In the afternoon there is a drive to Montmorency or elsewhere in the neighbourhood. The Princess on the way tells them of the home of which she always dreams. After dinner there is a discussion on literature or art until 11.30. The Princess retires, and the men observe the custom of the house, which is to go up to old Giraud's room for stories until 2 a.m.

Another picture belongs to 1868. The Goncourts spend three weeks at Saint-Gratien. Gautier is there for a week, Flaubert for a few days. Among those who come and go, politicians are few or none. Painters arrive for week-ends; men of letters on Wednesdays; the Primolis on Thursday; the rest of the week the house-party is small. The regular guests sleep, or seem to sleep, until 11 in the morning. The Princess only comes down a few minutes before breakfast at 11.30, the newspapers in one hand, the other held out to be kissed. At this hour she is gay, lively, and expansive. Smoking takes place on the verandah after breakfast, the Princess lighting the men's cigars for them, while abusing the smell of tobacco. At 1 o'clock she goes over to the studio, where she is now much occupied with a Japanese album, from which she copies birds and flowers

on to a screen, old Giraud at her back all the time. At 5 she stops work and takes the party out for a drive or an excursion on the lake; or perhaps only wanders in the park, walking rapidly ahead and ever turning round, throwing sentences at them, punctuated with cries of "Tine, Tine!" or "Tom, Tom!" to one of her straying dogs. Back in the château, she takes only a quarter of an hour to dress for dinner, and is almost always the first of the women to come down.

The day of parting was always painful to her. "Not that word, I don't like it!" she answered almost roughly to Edmond de Goncourt's "Good-bye" once. The younger brother tells of her farewell speech to them on another occasion, "I love you very much, though you are always contradicting me."

Jules de Goncourt paid his last visit to the château of Saint-Gratien in 1869, when occurred a scene which has often been quoted. He was ill, indeed, was already suffering from the disease which carried him off in the following year, at the age of forty. His nerves were in an irritable state, and the Princess somehow offended him by an allusion to his malady. Then at the breakfast-table the discussion turned upon Adolphe Franck, of the Institut de France. The Princess bestowed upon him praise which seemed to Goncourt excessive. "Very well, Princess," he suddenly burst out, "why don't

you turn Jewess ? ” A complete silence followed, and the other guests sat pale and horrified. After breakfast, Goncourt went to apologise to the Princess, swearing his deep affection for her and dropping tears upon her hand. (The account is his own.) She took him in her arms, kissed him upon the cheeks, and said : “ Why, of course I forgive you ! You know how I love you. I too, for some time past, owing to political affairs, have been in a nervous state.”

The reconciliation was complete, and the Princess two months later lent the Goncourts her pavilion of Catinat to rest in, both brothers being ill at once. Her liking for them was very sincere, and the younger of them especially was a most fervent admirer. It is said, indeed, that he expressed his feelings so openly that some friend felt bound to warn him that he was compromising the Princess. In the portion of the *Journal des Goncourt* which is due to his pen he shows his admiration in many passages. After the first visit to the Rue de Courcelles, for the dinner in honour of *Renée Mauperin*, he exclaims ecstatically : “ This is the true *salon* of the nineteenth century, with a mistress of the house who is the perfect type of the modern woman ; a woman whose amiability is like her smile—the sweetest smile in the world, that rich smile of charming Italian mouths—endowed with the charm of

naturalness, putting you at your ease with her familiar speech and the vivacity of all that passes through her head."

The house delights him, too, and the circular dining-room, with its panels of purple silk and its mirrors in elegant frames. But we hear more of the Princess's Paris home from a writer of her own sex, Madame Octave Feuillet, who made her acquaintance a few years earlier than the Goncourt brothers. "The *salon*," she says, "was that of a princess-artist and a very great lady. . . . The reception-rooms, including even the winter-gardens, were full of treasures arranged with exquisite taste. Pictures by the great masters, bronze and marble statues, Chinese vases holding gigantic palms, tapestries and magnificent old furniture adorned the palace in the Rue de Courcelles. Sometimes the Princess received me in the daytime, in her private apartments on the first floor. As I climbed the beautiful staircase, with its Chinese draperies falling in silken cascades, and its peacocks drooping their brilliant tails like half-opened jewel-cases, it used to seem to me as though I were mounting the stair of one of the sultans whose story is told to us by Scheherazade."<sup>1</sup>

Madame Feuillet adds an interesting paragraph concerning the Princess at the head of her table: "Every dinner was a triumph for

<sup>1</sup> Madame Feuillet, *Quelques Années de Ma Vie*.

her. I can still see her making her entry into the dining-room with her proud carriage, a long train behind her, her arms like a statue's, a triple row of pearls encircling her magnificent bosom. I can see her seated as on a throne, facing the golden eagle which spreads its wings over the fruits and flowers of the Imperial table. I recall her especially as she distributed her amiable smiles and gave a glance to every guest to make sure that he was content where he was; for the Princess was most kind and wished all her friends to be happy."

The evidence is abundant that the Princess succeeded in her desire, that under her roof her friends were indeed happy.

## CHAPTER XII

### FAMILY DISPUTES

IN a life like that of the Princess Mathilde, where the outstanding events are few, it is difficult to observe at all closely the sequence of time. From the birth of the Second Empire until its ruin seventeen years later, little of more importance than the making of a new friend, or the loss of an old one or some relative, occurred to affect the current of her days. We must, however, try to introduce some kind of narrative amid the general description. We have already reached in Chapter X. the year 1854, when the Princess watched with so much sorrow the anti-Russian policy of the Emperor. In the autumn of this year a visit was paid to Saint-Gratien by two members of her family, the acquaintance of one of whom she now made for the first time.

The early romance of Jerome Bonaparte's career is too well known to need telling here. The shamefully betrayed Elizabeth Patterson, whom Napoleon I. "hurled back on what she

hated most—her Baltimore obscurity,”<sup>1</sup> bore her husband one son, born at Camberwell after the separation in 1805, and christened Jerome-Napoleon. This boy she brought up partly in Baltimore, partly in Europe, without the contribution of a single farthing to his maintenance by his father, and, when he was sixteen, introduced him in Rome to Madame Lœtitia, the Princess Pauline, and Lucien and Louis Bonaparte, who all received him with affection. There was a scheme to marry him to one of Joseph Bonaparte’s daughters, and the reconciliation of the family was so far complete that in 1826 the young man paid a visit to his father. At the age of six, therefore, the Princess Mathilde first set eyes on her half-brother. Elizabeth Patterson’s son was treated with affection, as his own letters show, but his appreciation of the insecure position of the exiled Bonapartes and his attachment to the United States combined to make him determine to return to America. In 1829, to the disgust of his mother—“ever an Imperial Bonapartiste *quand même*”<sup>2</sup>—he married a daughter of Benjamin Williams and settled down to life in the New World.

In September 1854 the founder of the American family of Bonaparte visited France

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Elizabeth (Patterson) Bonaparte to Lady Morgan, dated Baltimore, March 14, 1849 (*Lady Morgan's Memoirs*, ii. 503).

<sup>2</sup> Same letter.

with his elder son, named after himself and now twenty-four years of age, and appealed to Napoleon III. to recognise their legitimacy according to French law. Old Jerome, in his devotion to his other son, Prince Napoleon, took alarm and made a protest to the Emperor. But Mathilde, whose breach with her father was still unhealed, welcomed her kinsmen to Saint-Gratien and insisted that they should have the title of Prince in her household at least. The son joined the French army and went out to the Crimea, whence he was able to write to his aunt in November of the deplorable effect produced by the retirement of Prince Napoleon from the front. The commission appointed by the Emperor to discuss the legitimacy of the Patterson-Bonapartes decided in their favour, and the vexation of old Jerome and Napoleon was as great as the pleasure of Mathilde.

But suddenly a change came about. On New Year's Day, 1855, the Emperor was too much afflicted by gout to preside over the usual family banquet. He requested his uncle to receive the guests, in his stead, at the Palais-Royal. Jerome made apologies to his daughter for his past conduct, and the Princess accepted them dutifully. On January 2 the old man called upon her with handsome presents, and informed her that she had caused him to pass the best night which he had enjoyed for a long time. At the end of the month Prince Napoleon

returned to Paris, meeting with a very mixed reception, in which the outcry against his “cowardice” predominated. But his sister, who had only been estranged from him because of his league with her father against her, now espoused his cause. Viel-Castel in August laments that “she has become a warm supporter of her brother, who cajoles her to her face and scoffs at her behind her back.” In consequence, he adds, the Patterson brother is now plain Monsieur to Nieuwerkerke. Jerome and Napoleon, on the other hand, come over to dinner at Saint-Gratien and take Mathilde out on the lake in the evening, Jerome at the rudder, the Prince and Nieuwerkerke at the oars. Visiting Saint-Gratien a year later still, Viel-Castel finds the Princess furious at the decision of the family council that Jerome’s eldest son shall bear the name of Bonaparte, though without the civil rights of his filiation. Her *amour-propre* is hurt, she speaks in a very hostile way, and inclines towards the opposition to the Emperor.

Nevertheless, it was difficult for the Princess to remain on good terms with her brother, owing to his conduct. The necessity of conciliating his cousin, especially in view of the expectation of Eugénie’s motherhood, led the Emperor to treat him with a deference which the majority thought very ill-deserved. Among other distinctions Prince Napoleon received the

presidency of the juries of the forthcoming Exhibition. A list was submitted to him, in this capacity, of artists who were considered worthy of the Legion of Honour. On this he found Nieuwerkerke's name and promptly crossed it off. Nieuwerkerke obtained the decoration, notwithstanding; but it is not surprising that the Princess at her dinner-table soon afterwards criticises her brother's manner of life severely, his decoration of his rooms with portraits of Rachel everywhere, and his construction of a toy temple in her honour at the Palais-Royal! She assures her guests on another occasion that the Emperor has declined to send the Prince as ambassador to St. Petersburg for the coronation of the new Tsar, Alexander II., fearing the discredit which he might bring upon France. And it is not without a touch of malice that she tells of her brother's furious anger that Eugénie's child is a boy.

The birth of the Prince Imperial was the great event of the spring of 1856. The Princess expressed her gladness at it, though earlier she had apparently disliked the prospect, in the first flush of her reconciliation with Prince Napoleon. Now she declared that she saw in the birth a guarantee of future security. Nevertheless she joined with her father and brother in putting difficulties in the way of those who arranged the ceremonial on the occasion of the baptism. Prince Napoleon

began by declining to be present at all, and gave way sulkily at the end. Jerome declared that he would not come because he and his son were asked to ride in a coach with Prince Oscar of Sweden and the Dowager Grand Duchess of Baden, the former Stephanie Beauharnais. As for the Princess Mathilde, she expressed great discontent because she was to share a coach with the Duchess of Hamilton, who was not an Imperial Highness nor so closely connected as she was with the Emperor.

Petty as such quarrels over precedence may seem, they are of course natural in Courts, especially in a Court where etiquette was so strictly insisted on as that of Napoleon III. The Princess Mathilde, despite the freedom which she liked in her private life, approved of formality on public occasions and expected her full rights. A few days after the Prince Imperial's baptism we find her complaining to intimate friends at Saint-Gratien that the Empress does not treat the Imperial family as she should and that it is her will which counts for all at Court. Three years later the same question arose again. There was a *Te Deum* at Notre-Dame after the victory of Solferino. In the procession to the cathedral the Princess's carriage had no cavalry escort nor even an equerry at the window.<sup>1</sup> The Empress this

<sup>1</sup> Still more comment was aroused by the fact that at the service the Empress's Spanish waiting-woman, Pepa, had a seat next the Princesse d'Essling.

time was certainly responsible, Napoleon being absent in Italy. Viel-Castel did not think that the Princess was strong enough in her resentment of the slight, and would have liked to see her retire from all Court ceremonies if such treatment continued. He frequently deplores her lack of advisers who might keep her on the right line of conduct. Nieuwerkerke is worse than useless. Not only does he cause an open scandal by the way in which he breakfasts, dines, and dresses in the Rue de Courcelles, a uniformed employee of the Louvre bringing his clothes to him; but he makes no attempt to persuade the Princess to be an *Altesse Impériale* and secure her rights in a dignified fashion. The Empress (we are still following Viel-Castel) is offended at the Princess's popularity and does not care to see her at the Tuilleries. The Princess is justifiably hurt by this attitude of her cousin's wife, but she adopts wrong methods in reply. For instance, in 1857 the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia comes to Paris and pays his first visit of honour to Mathilde before any other member of the family. The list of invitations to meet him at the Tuilleries, however, does not include her name at all. What does she do? There is a grand ball at the Ministry of Marine. To this the Princess secures an invitation for the Countess Castiglione, and in the course of the evening she makes a tour of the rooms on the arm of



THE COUNTESS CASTIGLIONE.



the Grand Duke Constantine, followed by the Countess on the arm of another Russian. "Offended at not being invited to the family dinners with the Grand Duke, she sets herself to chaperone the Emperor's mistress! How pitiable this is!"

It is true that the Princess Mathilde took up with some warmth the acquaintance of the beautiful Florentine, whose arrival in Paris created such a stir in society and such gossip at Court. She not only chaperoned her in public, but invited her to the Rue de Courcelles with her husband—a good-looking young man, whose motto was "I am the model husband, I hear and see nothing"—and made her sit for her portrait to Eugène Giraud. Viel-Castel was convinced that relations between Nieuwerkerke and *la belle Castiglione* were unduly intimate; but this is the kind of accusation which he makes on every page of his diary. With regard to the Princess's conduct towards the notorious lady, it hardly seems that others regarded it as so significant as he did. He himself records at the end of November in the same year that the Empress and the Princess Mathilde are on wonderfully friendly terms for the moment, exchanging trinkets, showing each other their jewellery, and looking most amiably at each other. In the following summer, too, Eugénie visits Saint-Gratien in a most gracious mood to fetch the Princess to spend the day at Saint-

Cloud. She evidently wants to draw closer to the only member of the Imperial family sincerely devoted to the Emperor, explains the diarist.

A longer invitation to Saint-Cloud followed in the autumn of 1858, and then another for one of the famous house-parties at Compiègne. The radiance of Mathilde's arrival at Compiègne was somewhat marred by the fact that Nieuwerkerke, tactless as ever, arrived in the neighbourhood on the very same day. A cousin of his, de Gouy, had a house there, at which he probably stayed for the hunting which always accompanied the Court's presence at Compiègne. He was not one of the invited guests at the château for the week, although he had just managed to ingratiate himself with the Empress by his cleverness, says Viel-Castel, at the *petits jeux* which delighted Eugénie and her friends. By his unwisdom now he imperilled again his reception by the Empress.

The relations between the wife and the cousin of Napoleon III., more amicable in 1858 than in any other year during the Empire, became strained again over the Italian question. Both ladies interested themselves keenly in this, on opposite sides, and exerted all the influence which they could bring to bear on the Emperor. They were, therefore, necessarily driven farther asunder, and the Princess found herself in the same camp as her brother. When Prince Napoleon set out for Turin in January 1859,

to fetch his bride Clothilde, daughter of King Victor Emanuel, he entrusted Mathilde with the purchase of her *corbeille* and diamonds. On his return he was met at Fontainebleau by Mathilde and their father. The family was united, as seldom before. But still the Princess could not shut her eyes to her brother's many failings. Speaking to the Emperor one day about the proposed increase of the Prince's pension, she said : " You are not aware, then, that Napoleon is your bitterest enemy ? You don't know how they talk at his house, or that he expresses himself loudly in a most disloyal strain ? " To her intimates at the Rue de Courcelles she made no secret of the Prince's ill-manners towards his wife, his coldness, brusqueness, and reported unfaithfulness already —little more than a month after marriage. However, she recognised early Clothilde's narrowness of mind and bigotry, and quoted with delight to her guests a letter in which the Queen of Holland—her cousin Sophia, whom she had met as a child at the Court of Stuttgart—declared that " a princess surrounded by a Chinese wall of pride could never make her way in France." Yet we shall find this same Clothilde among the few members of the family who were present at the death-bed in the Rue de Berri.

It would be very unfair to blame the Princess Mathilde for the varying affection with which

she regarded some of her relatives at different times. Particularly is this true in the case of Prince Napoleon. Although they had been brought close together by their Italian sympathies, he did not hesitate any the more to deal her a most unbrotherly blow. On June 24, 1860, Jerome Bonaparte died at his country seat of Villegenis, with Mathilde and Napoleon at his bedside, and his last mistress<sup>1</sup> in an adjoining room. A month before his death he had declared to Mathilde that his property was to be equally divided between her and her brother. Prince Napoleon, however, as soon as the old Prince was gone, seized all his papers and, with the aid of Fould, the Minister of State, tried to keep her out of the property. She went to the Emperor in great anger, swearing that after this she would never see her brother again, even on his death-bed. Fould, too, was the object of her wrath. It was with much joy, therefore, that she heard of his disgrace a few months later. There was a select party in the Rue de Courcelles one night in November, including the Emperor himself. The Princess was radiant. Asked by one of her guests why she looked so contented, she retorted, "So you don't know that *he* is going?"

<sup>1</sup> This was the wife of his equerry, Baron de Plancy, described as a tall, red-haired creature of no personal charm. The Princess Mathilde is said to have forced herself, in spite of a great repugnance, to receive the lady, whom she was in any case bound to see when she called upon her father.

"Who?" "Why, Fould, Fould! . . . At last, it is over!"

Fould's dismissal was followed by the Emperor's decision that, of the million francs a year which had been Jerome's, three hundred thousand should go to Mathilde and the remainder to the Treasury. Prince Napoleon, though already in possession of a million a year, was very discontented, but could do nothing. As for the Princess, she now saw her annual income brought up to seven hundred thousand francs—nearly £28,000—and could afford to listen to the generous promptings of her heart. Gradually she softened toward her brother. She allowed herself one gibe which became famous. Hearing of her sister-in-law's approaching motherhood, she exclaimed, "Clothilde's child . . . why, it must be a devil in a holy-water vessel!" In August 1862 the reconciliation was complete. It could not but come about, says Viel-Castel, since the friends of the Palais-Royal were the friends of the Rue de Courcelles and Saint-Gratien—the *Italianissimes* whom the diarist so much hated. Doubtless, also, the Princess had been moved in Napoleon's favour by the furious storm which fell upon him in 1861, when he refused to challenge the Duke of Aumale for writing of him as "the man who left the Crimea too early and reached Solferino too late." Mathilde was not one to see another Bonaparte unjustly assailed, and

it cannot be said that there was a just cause for denouncing Napoleon as a coward because he did not now call out Aumale.

No further long estrangement between sister and brother seems to have taken place, though her criticisms of him continued to be frequent and free. Her contempt for his many glaring faults was tempered by her appreciation of the cruelty of his position, compelling him to look on where he felt that he could act, to fill small posts when his ambitions and abilities craved great ones. They were alike enough in character—though life had warped his while it expanded hers—to enable her to sympathise with him as few, if any others, could. Unhappily his mental and moral deformation constantly drove him to acts which repulsed her sympathy ; and so he went on his almost solitary way, followed by few and befriended by less. Where it would take the skill of a Tacitus to do so successfully, it is useless to attempt to sum Prince Napoleon up briefly. “The most prodigiously intelligent and prodigiously vicious man that ever lived,” says Baron du Casse. “*Un César manqué,*” says some one else. “Entirely free from prejudices—including modesty and continence,” says a third. Was ever any man so ill-matched in his parts ?

## CHAPTER XIII

### A CHANGE OF BIOGRAPHERS

THE increasingly Italian tone of the Rue de Courcelles in the early sixties has already been noted, and also the effect which this produced upon the self-constituted chronicler of the Princess Mathilde's doings down to this period. The Count and Countess Vimercati are always at her side, Benedetti, French Minister and *persona gratissima* to the Court of Turin, is a close friend, Italian affairs must not be discussed in the house except from the point of view hostile to the Papacy, and the Princess and Nieuwerkerke censure the Emperor for not yielding to the demand for the instant removal of the French troops from Rome. Count Vimercati is in great power, and persuades her in the autumn of 1862, when Italy is full of anti-French demonstrations, that this is the very time for her to exhibit her sympathies and take a villa at Belgirata, on Lake Maggiore,<sup>1</sup> so off she goes with Nieuwer-

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, in his "Portrait of the Princess," speaks of her purchase of this property, in which to spend the last weeks of autumn, and says that "she went back to Italy, her first love, which she had known beautiful and captive, and now found free, gratefully doing homage to her as the close relative, and as it were ambassadress, of the Emperor of the French."

kerke, Eugène Giraud, and the rest. She visits Turin for the wedding of the Princess Pia to the King of Portugal, taking with her Madame Vimercati, at the special request of Victor Emmanuel. Meanwhile in France the pro-Italian party meets with a check. The Ministry is changed, “disitalianised,” and the Empress is rumoured to have had a hand in the affair. Her enemies compare her to Marie-Antoinette. As “the Austrian” had once been the target of abuse, so now “the Spaniard” is told to beware.

Among the strongest partisans of the change was the journal *La France*, which was established in the summer of 1862, under the direction of La Guéronnière, to uphold the right wing of the Imperialist party and combat Liberalism. La Guéronnière invited Viel-Castel to join the staff. The Count accepted, and opened with an article on “The Ultras of 1862,” at which the Princess Mathilde took offence, professing to recognise a caricature of her *salon*, and particularly of Benedetti. She left for Belgirata very angry with her old, though we can scarcely say faithful, friend. On her return to Paris he found himself no longer welcome in the Rue de Courcelles. A gap occurs in the “black books” between October 1862 and April 1863, when Viel-Castel takes up his pen again and complains that only an excuse had been wanted to get rid of him, and the excuse had been discovered.

In spite of what Viel-Castel says, however, it seems that it was not politics, but a personal matter, which ended the long friendship. Count Horace openly criticised Nieuwerkerke, and this could not be overlooked. We need not enter into all the details of the affair. There was an article in *La France* which found fault with a certain action by Nieuwerkerke in connection with an exhibition of the works of living artists at the Louvre. The article was Viel-Castel's, and the head of the Louvre, not unreasonably, wrote to him to say that he could not allow a member of his staff to attack his administration, and must therefore dispense with his services. Viel-Castel replied with a letter which, according to him, was brief, mild, and friendly, failing to understand either why he had been treated as he had, or why his retirement from his post should make any change in their mutual relations. Nieuwerkerke wrote no further, but the Princess took up the correspondence.

"MY DEAR VIEL-CASTEL [she said],

"I am very sad at the step taken against you, but I must confess that in reading your article on the Exhibition I thought you had seized on a pretext for leaving the administration of the Gallery.

"No exception can be taken to the personal references in your criticism, but you blame all the measures of the Minister [of State] and the Director-General.

"I regret all this, believe me, as I thought you quite one of our friends. Anyhow, I shall always be charmed to be of use to you, and to express to you again my regard for you.

"MATHILDE."

Viel-Castel answered, protesting his real friendship and defending his conduct. The Princess retorted, traversing his defence, asking why he could not have consulted his director and friend before writing publicly, and telling him it was useless to attribute his dismissal to spite. "But let us drop these recriminations, which are as painful to me as to you. Unlike the others, I have the courage to tell you that you are in the wrong, very much in the wrong, though I might have said nothing."

The last word was left with the Princess—for the time. Not until the publication of the "black books" did she learn how Viel-Castel revenged himself on her and on Nieuwerkerke. Nothing can excuse the remaining attacks of the diarist, except that they were the venom of a dying man (he succumbed in November 1864 to a painful disease) who fancied himself ill-used. His last entry concerning the household in the Rue de Courcelles is that of October 19, 1863, when he records that Mme. de Nieuwerkerke is said to be dying at the house of her husband's cousin near Compiègne, and that Nieuwerkerke calls regularly—speculating on

the chances of her death, he suggests. As the apoplectic Demidoff is already in his second childhood, and declared incapable of managing his affairs,<sup>1</sup> there are good prospects for the advancement of Nieuwerkerke by marriage with the Princess, who could then procure for him the title of Highness! Such is Viel-Castel's parting shot at the people who had for twelve years received him as a welcome guest.

After the disappearance from the scene of the writer of the *cahiers noirs*, the chief authorities for the Princess Mathilde's life are the brothers Goncourt and Sainte-Beuve, who give a very different picture from that of their bitter-tongued and bitter-hearted predecessor, a picture which is much more convincing, and harmonises with the many stray references to the Rue de Courcelles and Saint-Gratien in the works of occasional visitors. The difference in the picture was not due to any change made by the Princess in her *salon*. Viel-Castel does indeed write, in November 1857, that "the Princess now wishes to receive every evening, but *sans gala*; she particularly wants to have a *salon* that is at once pleasant and influential"—for which, in his

<sup>1</sup> In August 1862 Viel-Castel is amused at the nomination to some honour of "the disgusting imbecile, worn out with debauchery . . . his affairs in the hands of trustees to prevent the wasting of his fortune." The *Moniteur* suppressed all mention of the nomination, and the Tsar refused to transmit it, as he would normally to a subject of his. Years earlier Demidoff was said to be subsidising a paper in Paris to attack the Tsar of the day, Nicholas.

opinion, she has not the right character, both she and Nieuwerkerke making friends of nobodies. These "nobodies," of course, include the distinguished men whose names are familiar to all, though to Viel-Castel they are "little socialists, base flatterers, and atheists baser and more flattering still, Sainte-Beuve, Littré, Renan. . . ." The Goncourts began their acquaintance with the Princess so late that they escaped the tomahawk.

We have already heard some of the opinions upon the Princess Mathilde and her surroundings contained in the *Journal*, which Jules de Goncourt kept down to the time of his premature death, and Edmond continued thereafter. The mine is a rich one, especially during the life of the younger brother, and would be difficult to exhaust. To the sketches of the Princess in an earlier chapter we may now add another :

"This freedom, this brusque charm, this passionate speech, this coloured language of the artist, this slashing treatment of stupidity, this mixture of virility and femininely delicate attention, this combination of qualities and even of defects which bear the impress of our period and are quite new in an *Altesse*—all these make her the type of a nineteenth-century princess, a sort of Marguerite of Navarre in the skin of a woman-Napoleon."

So speaks Jules de Goncourt after one of his

early visits to Saint-Gratien. Here is another briefer picture :

"A curious physiognomy is that of the Princess, traversed in turn by every fleeting impression, the unaccountable eyes suddenly darting at you and piercing you through. Her mind is somewhat like her glance in its quick sallies."

Her dress pleases him with its taste, the taste of one with a true eye for colour. She gratifies him once by wearing a costume which she knows he likes, a low-cut evening robe of cerise silk, a black lace wrap, and about her neck the splendour of her seven-rowed collar of pearls upon a cravat of black lace. (Pearls are her passion, and her guests surprise her once at Saint-Gratien, sitting upon her verandah, her head upon one hand, her eyes fixed lovingly on an object in the other—a single pearl which a Dutch dealer is persuading her to buy for eight thousand francs.) He is ravished at meeting her one morning in Paris, radiant in a delicious Chinese blue crêpe, heavily embroidered with exotic flowers.

Many are the references to her personal habits, and particularly to her love of surrounding herself with dogs. While she works in her studio in the country there are three of them snoring in a basket. As she walks in her garden, a little pack follows her, to call which to her side she incessantly interrupts her

animated flow of speech. "Chine," and "Tine," and "Tom" and "Dick" are always in evidence. Edmond de Goncourt notes the continuance of this dog-worship after the fall of the Empire, and describes the characters of the day, the little paralysed "Mie," the gymnastic "Nina," the hippopotamus-like "Miss," and "Dick," coarsened by high-living, always getting himself lost.

A quaint portrait of the Princess in one of her gayest moods is drawn by the younger brother towards the end of 1869. The Goncourts are at work in their own home when two carriages draw up at their door. The Princess bursts in upon them, followed by a cousin and some friends. Upon the table, amid the scattered leaves of a novel upon which they are engaged, she sees a pot of jam and a piece of bread. She seizes the bread, dips the spoon into the jam, and proceeds to eat. "Oh, if the Duchess of Angoulême could only see you now!" cries Jules.

Of her tastes in literature, drama, and art, we naturally hear something, though not as much as might have been expected. For all her patronage of the Goncourts' own work, her judgment in fiction does not escape criticism. "I only like novels in which I should like to be the heroine myself," she explained once. "This shows exactly the literary standard among women with regard to novels," Jules comments.

When she speaks at her dinner-table about ancient tragedy, he remarks that she only loves and understands the modern, and seems to have for the classical the schoolboy's horror of his task. But he is obliged to recognise her generous championship of *Henriette Maréchal*, with which he and Edmond made so conspicuous a failure at the Théâtre Français. On the night of December 5, 1861, she returned home with her gloves split and her hands burning through the applause she had given while others hissed, howled, and uttered catcalls. Abusive anonymous letters rewarded her faithfulness to the authors, and an article in *La France*—the Empress's journal, Goncourt calls it—combined an attack on *Henriette Maréchal* with disparagement of the Princess's circle. “Is this not a case of the jealousy of the *salon* at the Tuilleries against that of the Rue de Courcelles, that little court of art and literature?”

The *Journal* tells us less about the Princess's views of art than about artists. Once she is “terribly revolutionary” and, in the midst of an academic dinner-party at her house, declares loudly that she prefers Japanese to Etruscan vases. Her modern preferences make her an enthusiastic patron, and she has the power to do much for her *protégés*. She boasts one day at Saint-Gratien that she has tried hard, and not unsuccessfully, to inspire the Emperor and Empress with a taste for art, and has made

painting and painters fashionable. "Every one has his favourite artist nowadays," she writes another time to a friend. "My lawyer has his painter, too—Corot." She complained that she did not always meet with gratitude from those she befriended. Two painters, for instance, to whom she had been kind, in return did their best to prevent her teacher Hébert from getting a medal. Yet it was remarked as one of her characteristics that no amount of ingratitude checked her impulse to help those who sought her patronage. She was hurt by a lack of appreciation of what she had done, and could on occasion declare her mind to the offender; but she was none the less ready thereafter to welcome talent and labour on behalf of its recognition and reward.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SOME LITERARY FRIENDS

THE Rue de Courcelles at the height of<sup>1</sup> the Princess Mathilde's reign as hostess—when she was commonly known in Paris, we are told, as *the Princess* simply—was frequented by so many eminent persons that a mere catalogue of their names would take up considerable space. We may content ourselves with the mention of a few of those in whose company we constantly hear of her—some of the prominent *Mathildiens* as they came to be called.

Dumas father and son were both welcome guests for many years. In the first year of the Empire we read of the elder man, asked if he had heard any new verse, proceeding to quote a number of skits on the Emperor, Empress, and other members of the Imperial family,<sup>1</sup> to the intense disgust of Viel-Castel,

<sup>1</sup> Verses of the type of the following, which was popular at the time:

Dans les fastes impériales  
L'oncle et le neveu sont égaux  
L'oncle prenait des capitales,  
Le neveu prend des capitaux.

who says that in a few days' time he will be boasting of having repeated all these infamies before the Emperor's cousin. It was a mistake to receive such a man into the house. He talks of Prince Napoleon with Arago, calling him familiarly Napoleon; and to the Princess he remarks: "Call me Dumas, just Dumas—I've been working for that for twenty-five years!" Dining one Sunday night with her, he talks of himself without ceasing for four hours, exalting himself to a position equal to the Emperor's, abusing the Government for refusing him the directorship of the Odéon, and so on, till 11 o'clock. Only when he is going on a visit to Russia in 1858 does she have the sense to put aside his request for letters of introduction. In 1865 he is at her table again, where Jules de Goncourt describes his gigantic frame, his negro hair turned pepper-and-salt colour, his hippopotamus eyes in an enormous moon-face. He talks away, not brilliantly nor wittily, always about himself, with the vanity of a great child, pouring out in a husky voice a stream of facts, astonishing facts, and never touches wine, coffee, or tobacco.

Viel-Castel tells one curious story about a criticism by the Princess Mathilde of the elder Dumas. It was in the autumn of 1854, and the Princess remarked to the Girauds that Dumas had made himself quite impossible. Personally, she continued, she had always

looked upon him as an amusing *pantin* (puppet, jumping-jack), and it was as such that it had pleased her to invite him to her house. Eugène Giraud was indignant at the word *pantin*, and the Princess explained herself: "I could not invite Dumas as a man of high birth, because he was a bastard and half-negro; nor for his high position, for he has not got one. It was his intellect and that alone which made me seek him. I wanted his intellect to amuse mine, and his inexhaustible animation to enliven my little parties; and if I call him my *pantin* it is because I give that name to all who amuse me."

Giraud was not satisfied, however, and as he went up to bed that night he said to Viel-Castel, "All of us artists are *pantins* to the Princess." Viel-Castel comments on this that the Princess Mathilde made a great mistake in admitting artists to her intimacy, because artists are by nature jealous of all superiority, enemies of social distinctions, and suspicious of offence in every word. According to Viel-Castel, such people should only be asked on state occasions, not admitted to intimacy.

Dumas junior on one occasion annoys the Princess greatly, and not without cause. The Emperor hears that he is to be at a ball in the Rue de Courcelles, and asks that he shall be introduced to him. The Princess and Nieuwerkerke rejoice, and are full of plans, such

as that Napoleon shall bestow the Cross of the Legion of Honour on Dumas in the middle of the ball. But Dumas refuses absolutely to be present, saying, "I am timid and proud." A few months later he accepts the Legion of Honour. The Princess is furious, and Viel-Castel comments that it will be a happy day when princes understand that Bohemia merely looks upon their advances as acts of cowardice. But Dumas is ultimately forgiven, and years after shocks the Princess sadly with his views. All our feelings depend on the state of our stomachs, he maintains. A friend of his had just lost a beloved wife. Dumas invited him to dinner and gave him beef, whereon he passed back his plate, demanding "A little fat, please!" With a good stomach one cannot have a great sorrow. The other guests, including Jules de Goncourt, agree, or pretend to agree; but the Princess utters cries of horror as though over shattered illusions. "Her face was marked with disgust at our ideas, and a sort of child-like repugnance. At such a moment she forgets herself and does not reason. She would throw the furniture in your face, and her despair is almost comic in its genuineness."

Edmond About was discovered suddenly by Nieuwerkerke to be the coming literary man; and was welcomed to the Rue de Courcelles all the more for his attack on the Papal Government in 1859. He is in high favour for a time,

but ultimately offends the Princess by a thoughtless remark. Invited to dinner, he arrives early, and is talking to her when Nieuwerkerke appears. "I have got your property," says About, "but don't be afraid, you jealous man!" The Princess rises from her chair, rings the bell, and orders M. About's carriage to be called, as he is not staying to dinner. The Goncourts' criticism of About is that he was "a type of the successful egoist, not a heavy insupportable egoist, being partly redeemed by certain witty monkey-tricks and by the gentle literary flatteries he addressed to writers present, quoting to their faces passages out of their own works."

Théophile Gautier was a devoted adherent of the Princess, for whose friendship he coined the expression *amitié voluptueuse*. One day he arrives at her door, and some one comes up to ask if she can see M. Gautier. "What?" she exclaims, "can I see my poet?" She appoints him her librarian. "Has the Princess a library?" asks Gautier of one of the Goncourts. "I will give you some advice," is the answer. "Act as if she hadn't one!"

The Princess is preparing a surprise for the Emperor, who is coming to one of her evening parties with the Empress. She has some writings of the prisoner of Ham about the return of the great Napoleon's ashes to France. Gautier is given the commission of turning these into verse, to be recited by Agar. The

evening is a great success. The Emperor is seen to shed a tear—a poor consolation, Goncourt thinks, for Gautier's recent failure at the Academy election; but he orders that the recitation shall be heard again at the *Français*.

Gautier's gift in the improvisation of verse was much appreciated by the Princess. A memorial of his skill remains in the sonnet "La Verandah," which he wrote at Saint-Gratien, she furnishing the subject and the four rhyme-syllables. This is what Gautier produced :

Sous cette verandah, peinte en vert d'espérance,  
 On arrive et l'on part avec un souvenir  
 Si doux, qu'on y voudrait aussitôt revenir  
 Sous les fleurs des tropiques et les plantes de France.

Une main de déesse y guérit la souffrance,  
 Au mérite modeste elle ouvre l'avenir.  
 Elle sait couronner comme elle sait punir.  
 Pour le génie elle est pleine de déférence.

Devant elle enhardi, l'esprit prime-sautier,  
 Ainsi qu'Euphorion dansant sur la prairie,  
 Peut, entre terre et ciel, se montrer tout entier.

Pour que son œil pétille et que sa lèvre rie  
 Et que de toute humeur sa lèvre soit guérie,  
 Il suffit d'un bon mot de son bouffon Gautier.

Of Eudore Soulié we have already heard. In the literary world he was known chiefly for his writings about Molière. The Princess thought of him very differently from Viel-Castel, and made of him a lifelong friend. His daughters were all cherished by her, and through one of these she made the acquaintance of Victorien



THE PRINCESS MATHILDE BONAPARTE.



Sardou, who married her. The Princess often visited the Sardous at Marly, and is said to have once told the dramatist as she walked with him in his grounds, "It is here, not at Saint-Gratien, that I should have pitched my tent!"

Soulcy, of the Institut de France, was a frequent visitor in the early days of the Empire. We find him present on the only occasion we know of the Princess taking part in the diversion (if it is to be called a diversion) of table-rapping, which was soon to attract so much the Empress Eugénie, and even the Emperor. The Abbé Coquereau was also present, and Nieuwerkerke joined the Princess in asking questions of "the spirits." While they were thus engaged Pietri, Prefect of Police, paid a call, and mocked the enquirers. He was invited to put a question himself. What was his age? he asked. Forty-seven was the answer, which was correct. How many members were there in the secret society on which he had laid hands yesterday? Eighteen. And how many had sworn to kill the Emperor? Three. Both replies were right, said Pietri. Such at least is the tale, ending as usual with the confusion of the unbelievers.

Mérimée was often at the Rue de Courcelles, though his long friendship with the Montijo family bound him closely to the rival camp of the Tuilleries. Once we hear of him unable to get a hearing throughout the evening because

Arago spoilt all conversation with his buffooneries. Another time he is among the guests at a ball which the Princess Mathilde gave to celebrate the entry into society of the little Prince Imperial, the first in which he was allowed to be a dancer, and not a mere looker-on.<sup>1</sup> Arsène Houssaye was also there, and declares that it was a great sight to see the boy dancing with his big cousin, not a crumpled roseleaf under his feet, not a cloud in the air above him. The political situation was calm, and smiles were everywhere. One or two of those in the ball-room seemed rather out of the picture, such as Mérimée and Sainte-Beuve—not at all like Apollo and Adonis, says Houssaye, who cared for neither of them. Mérimée did not approve of the ball. A prince, he said, ought only to learn to be a soldier. Sainte-Beuve, however, though dancing had been no part of his own education, thought it good, and recalled that Louis XIV. had danced in Lulli's ballets, being helped thereby to conduct the

<sup>1</sup> Is the reference to the ball given by the Princess Mathilde in 1861, a children's costume-ball to celebrate the Prince Imperial's definite abandonment of petticoats for breeches after his fifth birthday? The young Prince appeared then as a white-wigged marquis and was very pleased with himself. It was on this occasion that he got into trouble with his mother for removing his shoes under the table, at the early supper served to the children after the dancing was over. He resented being obliged to put his tired feet back into the shoes again; but, fortunately for him, he was at his cousin Mathilde's, and she created a diversion by proceeding to the distribution of gifts among the little guests.

concert of Europe. Thus was imparted a literary tone even to such frivolity as a ball.

Gustave Flaubert, for many years gladly received by the Princess both in her Paris home and at Saint-Gratien, was one day the occasion of one of her characteristic outbursts, though she bore him no malice after she had delivered herself of what was on her mind. He had, it seems, been calling upon a lady commonly known in Paris society as "La Païva," one of the most enigmatic figures of the day. By birth a Polish Jewess,<sup>1</sup> of the name of Teresa Lachmann, she began by marrying a tailor, whom she deserted to become the mistress of the musician, Henri Herz. The latter went bankrupt and left her, whereon a fashionable dressmaker took her up, and financed her. Going to London, after various adventures she married the wealthy Portuguese Marquis Ajauro de Païva, who had been educated at Oxford. They parted soon afterwards in Paris, and La Païva instituted a *salon* in her house on the Place Saint-Georges, to which men of art and letters flocked. She entertained in magnificent style, and, indeed, was the great rival of the Princess Mathilde in the circle among which the Princess sought her friends. She was neither young nor very beautiful. The Princess

<sup>1</sup> According to Gautier, the natural daughter of the Grand Duke Constantine and a Jewish mother (*Journal des Goncourt*, September 27, 1863).

could not understand what fascination she had for clever men, and felt shamed by having to share with her Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Renan, and the rest. They stole twenty minutes from herself, she cried, when they came to dine, to rush off to the company of "*cette fille.*" How disgraceful was the power of such creatures, quite devoid of the art or genius of a Rachel, to whom philosophers, writers, and thinkers flocked—high-minded men eating the truffles of the courtesan!<sup>1</sup>

Flaubert was forgiven, however; as, sinning in such large company, he could not but be forgiven. He continued a friend of the Princess, and Edmond de Goncourt in 1874 told her of the gratitude which Flaubert, like himself, felt towards her. She had bought them both, so to speak, with her graciousness, her attentions, and her friendship—without which they might have been democrats like Zola. Her *salon* had been the buffer between the Government and the men of letters.

Another scene involves Sainte-Beuve, of

<sup>1</sup> The Princess one evening at Saint-Gratien indignantly refused her painter Hébert permission to paint a picture for La Païva "A wretch like that a patron of art!" she exclaimed. "Why, you could not even take your mother to see your pictures at her house!" She challenged Soulié to say whether he did not think it impossible to take her money. Raphael would have worked for any woman of his period, replied Soulié—and, as for himself, he had no principles! The Princess went off to bed, with a parting shot: "Really, with your outlook on life, if I were to come back to the world a second time I should wish to be 'a woman of temperament,' a drab!"

whom we shall soon hear much, and Eugène Giraud, of whom we have already heard a good deal. There had been a dinner in the Rue de Courcelles, and the guests were discussing love. Sainte-Beuve and Giraud, who were the two oldest present, protested against the theory that at a certain age one should mourn for love as a thing of the past.<sup>1</sup> The writer in melancholy tones thought that love might be begged by an old man as a charity, that a woman might be asked to tolerate and not hate you. "You don't know what it is," he sighed, "to feel that there can be no more love for you, that it is impossible because it can't be confessed, because one is old and would be ridiculous . . . because one is ugly!" The painter said that he could not himself love only one at a time, and that was the way to be at peace, not to be afraid of losing one. As he rambled on, the Princess told him he was disgusting. "Old Giraud knelt before her," says Jules de Goncourt, "with the eyes of a humbled satyr, his hairs like the caricatures with three wires on the top of the head, and kissed her hand, which she drew away at once, and pretended to wipe on her dress."

Neither with Flaubert nor with Giraud, of

<sup>1</sup> Prince Napoleon, who was at least a man of great experience, once told his sister's guests that travel was the best pleasure as one grew older, and that he personally had quite abandoned love for locomotion.

course, was the Princess seriously angry; nor yet with Goncourt when he made his unfortunate remark about her turning Jewess. The only unforgivable offence was an attack on her family, or at least on the heads of it. In 1886 she broke off her long friendship with Taine for this cause, and refused to renew it. Taine published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* that year his criticisms of the first Napoleon. He took the precaution of writing a letter of apology, or at least explanation, to the Princess. But she only tore up the letter, and threw it into the grate, and proceeded to call at his house to leave her card, with the letters P.P.C. written on it. Taine understood that this was final. He is said to have visited Renan, and lamented his misfortune. "My dear friend," said Renan, "I have quarrelled with a much greater lady than the Princess Mathilde." "Who is that?" "The Church!"

The other notable instance of her abandonment of an old friendship for a political reason is to be found in the quarrel which ended the Princess's relations with Sainte-Beuve, to which we now come.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To the list of the Princess's friends in this chapter, going somewhat farther afield, we may add the names of Pasteur, Octave Feuillet, Paul de Saint-Victor, Carpeaux, Delibes, Charles Garnier, Fromentin, Barbey d'Aurevilly, E. Caro, Daudet, Girardin, Viollet-Leduc, Rostand, François Coppée, Jules Sandeau, Ernest Lavisse, Guy de Maupassant, Berthelot, Prévost, Hérédia, Loti, Popelin, Lavedan, Raymond Poincaré, Hanotaux—but to exhaust the list of *Mathildiens* would be impossible,

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PRINCESS AND SAINTE-BEUVÉ

THE story of the friendship between the Princess Mathilde and Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve is a romance, passionless perhaps, yet decidedly a romance. Thanks to the care with which the Princess preserved the great critic's letters to her, we are able to trace its course fairly closely during the seven years while the friendship was intimate. The Princess's letters in reply may be in existence still, but she reclaimed them on Sainte-Beuve's death, and only two of them have seen the light. No doubt we have the more valuable side of the correspondence. Still it is impossible not to regret that we have not both sides, for the Princess's forceful originality in speech did not desert her when she took up her pen, and she would naturally have given of her best when she addressed herself to a man whom she so much admired.

The friendship was intimate, we have said, for seven years. But it had its first rise at least eleven years earlier, since Sainte-Beuve's adhesion to the cause of Louis-Napoleon in

1851 is attributed, apparently with justice, to the influence of the Princess and her brother. At that time Sainte-Beuve was forty-seven. The posthumous son of a literary-minded official of the town of Boulogne, he was trained in childhood by his half-English mother,<sup>1</sup> his father's sister, and the teachers about whom he has himself left a few notes in a fragment called *Ma Biographie*.<sup>2</sup> His education was liberal; and, though for some years his bent seemed to be towards medicine and led him to be a student at the hospital of Saint-Louis, his real talent could not be long hidden. He began to write, and at the age of twenty-three won for himself a place on the literary staff of the *Globe*, founded by one of his old schoolmasters, Dubois. Here he caught the attention of Victor Hugo, who made of him a friend and introduced him to the other Romantics in his train. He also introduced him to his wife, Adèle. The result, though by no means the speedy result, was an irreparable breach between the two men, and a separation of the husband from his wife. Hugo was far from blameless, for he was unfaithful first; nevertheless the affair with Madame Hugo is a blot on Sainte-Beuve's character which it is hard for his greatest devotees to excuse. It had no prejudicial effect

<sup>1</sup> She was Augustine Coilliot, the daughter of a Boulogne mariner and an Englishwoman, whose name is given as Midelton.

<sup>2</sup> *Souvenirs et Indiscrétions* (edition of 1880), pp. 2 ff.

on his literary advancement, which brought him in 1844 to the height of the Academy. When he made the acquaintance of the Princess Mathilde he had already commenced in the columns of the *Constitutionel* his famous series of Monday articles. About the same time also he had taken up his abode, for the rest of his life, at No. 11 Rue Mont-Parnasse, the house which his mother left to him on her death. His position was secure, as a writer; but to the Princess there remained to be won the credit of establishing him as a public man by recommending the Empire to him and him to the Empire. His return to her was handsome, for no one has left of her a more pleasing picture for posterity than he has, in his letters to her and his sketch of 1862.

A portion of that sketch has been quoted in the first chapter of this book. It came to be written in this way. A publisher, having planned to bring out under the title of the *Galerie Bonaparte* a series of portraits and biographies of the principal members of the Imperial family, commissioned Sainte-Beuve with the biography of the Princess Mathilde, a task for which he was doubly well equipped. He was noted for his ability in depicting women. "Have you ever been a woman," enquired one of him once, "since you claim to know us so thoroughly?" "No, madame, I am not the seer Teiresias, but only a humble

mortal who has loved you much!" And then, he had been acquainted with the Princess for years. The *Lettres à la Princesse* only commence in the middle of 1861, and the tone of the first few is too formal, in comparison with those that follow, to allow us to suppose that the friendship had yet matured. Moreover, it is not until after the publication of the "Portrait of the Princess,"<sup>1</sup> that Viel-Castel describes Sainte-Beuve as an *habitué* in the Rue de Courcelles.

To make sure of the likeness, therefore, Sainte-Beuve begged the Princess to do him the favour of coming to his house to pose, as it were, before him in his study. She came and sat opposite him at his writing-table for some hours, talking while he listened, took notes, and looked at her. When she had left he completed the work; and in the fifth of his published letters to her, dated July 2, 1862, he wrote reminding her of her promise to come to

<sup>1</sup> In April 1863, to be exact. On April 21, Viel-Castel writes: "That fat, round newspaper-scribbler, Sainte-Beuve, who looks like a plucked ortolan, is the acolyte with the thurible in this *salon*. He burns before the Princess all the distilled essences of his workshop, in the hope of getting into the Senate arm-in-arm with Nieuwerkerke, whose feet have so often already turned vainly in the direction of the Luxembourg." The diarist has just before been speaking of the Princess Mathilde's delight in "the socialistic impiety of Littré and the sacerdotal hatred of the ex-seminarist Renan"; and now he goes on to deplore the vulgarisation of the *salon* by vulgar-mannered people. Littré, Renan, and Sainte-Beuve are no better in his eyes than Eugène Giraud, and it never seems to have occurred to him that any of them were immortal.

hear what he had said. The following day was that of an Academy meeting. But, he says, "I have a particular pleasure in laying it as a sacrifice at your feet. I shall not go out that afternoon. The portrait has been copied fairly, and resolutely awaits confrontation with the original. Not without some beating of the heart; but heroes conceal this, and we must not be less brave."

The Princess complied and after her return home the second time answered his eulogy of her with one of him, which was fortunately preserved among his papers after his death, being either not returned or else copied before return with the rest of her letters to him.<sup>1</sup>

"In a corner of Paris," she says, "there is one road quieter than the rest. I was invited to No. 11, Rue Mont-Parnasse, and accepted with

<sup>1</sup> The other letter from the Princess, of which a copy was found among Sainte-Beuve's papers, was in answer to a query in a letter of his on January 19, 1866, about the success of Ponsard's play, *Le Lion Amoureux*. "Ponsard's play was a success," she replied. "It fascinated me—in the first place because the language was French, because the feelings aroused were French, and because it was admirably acted. My old Republican feelings were all stirred up anew; I should have joined the Republicans in exterminating the Royalists, who were bad Frenchmen.... I was pleased with myself. I can still feel keenly and patriotically.... I spent a good evening. The people who could not criticise asked lazily, 'Why bring all this up again?' What a spirit! What feebleness! What cowardice! As for me, since I am not sufficiently noble to have had relatives guillotined, only the roses of the Revolution are mine. I love it and understand it, without excusing its crimes; I am tender towards its errors, and I should like to see all Frenchmen appreciate its greatness and defend it."

great joy; I brought back from yesterday the most charming recollections. I discovered a charming little nest, pleasant scents, seclusion, not too much light; in a long room a very big table loaded with books, paper, pens; not a spot of ink; in the midst of all this material dwells a noble spirit, refined, caustic, insinuating, indulgent through kindness of heart and manner of life; smiling at the ways of malice and finding them everywhere; accessible to the whole world, but knowing its likes and dislikes; philosophical after the manner of the ancient Greeks, to whom the outward resemblance is strong; a believer without religion, a philosopher gifted with indignation, an investigator led on by curiosity; in fact, a spirit which understands all spirits and can explain them all, possessing the rare good fortune to have only such passion as is necessary in order to remain just and impartial.

“ And now, how could I not be proud to have occupied the attention of this man for several hours, and to have inspired him with the desire to know me well enough to convey to the public an appreciation of me which might please the most exacting ? ”

This portrait has roused the enthusiasm of all the warmest admirers of Sainte-Beuve, who declare that it paints him to the very life. It likewise delighted profoundly the subject himself, who can scarcely have expected to be made

the sitter when he invited the Princess to his house that he might equip himself for his picture of her. On receiving her letter, he replied with one overflowing with the gratitude which he professed himself incapable of putting into words. He wished he could forget his real self, so as to have only the portrait before his eyes. "You can no longer say that you have no *nuances*!" he continues. "I think I can find them. 'Not a spot of ink' is very nice. And so is the passion of which a little is necessary to remain impartial and just. That is how you ought to write whenever your heart prompts you, about all the impressions and memories that come back to you—to write by fits and starts, with no other idea than that of preserving the momentary keenness of impression, the rapid retrospect. At the end of some months, or years, this will be interesting, and also you will have an album worth looking through. But why am I taking on myself to give advice when I should only be showing thankfulness and marking the precious date which has brought me such gracious kindness? You have yourself marked the date in letters which will not fade."<sup>1</sup>

The Princess's reference to "the strong re-

<sup>1</sup> Some years later, when speaking of his wish to include his "Portrait of the Princess" in one of the volumes of his *Nouveaux Lundis* (as was done) he asks her, "Why can I not add after it those two charming pages of the counter-portrait which I then received, the very next day?"

semblance to the ancient Greeks" was perhaps the most graceful compliment which she could, in the actual circumstances, have paid. Sainte-Beuve was indeed supposed to have a physical likeness to one celebrated Greek—to Socrates. In other words, he was far from handsome. He was short and stout, in fact paunchy as he grew old. His face was full, always kept closely shaven, the massive receding forehead surmounted by a ring of reddish hair, fairly long and thick, but leaving the conical summit of the head bald. The nose was large and strong, the ears rather long. Under red bushy brows twinkled small yet prominent eyes. To some observers the eyes, to others the mouth, were his best feature. Both had a pleasant malice about them, and when he smiled he never failed to charm. He was often called ugly, he thought himself ugly,<sup>1</sup> and avoided as much as possible discussions on personal beauty; yet his ugliness, if the word must be used, was redeemed by the illumination of genius behind the mask. He did not enhance his appearance by his dress. His bald head he covered, indoors, with a black velvet cap, which he often rubbed feverishly

<sup>1</sup> See the story told on p. 163 above and compare what Sainte-Beuve says about his discovery, at the age of seventeen, of his unattractiveness. "I continually compared my face with those of other young people of my acquaintance, and felt envious of the faces of the biggest fools among them. For whole weeks I was tortured by the fear that I should never be loved, but should be deprived of all such raptures by the rapid progress of my ugliness."

over his skull and occasionally snatched off to twist in his hand ; in privacy he substituted a large handkerchief for this cap. Jules de Goncourt notes his affectation of light, youthful, springlike clothes—which we are meant to gather did not become him. Victor Pavie speaks of his outward resemblance to “an elementary schoolmaster or a provincial notary.” A more spiteful critic<sup>1</sup> says that he always looked like a countryman in his Sunday clothes, and describes him as waddling along the street, with his all but inseparable companion, his umbrella, in his hand, his eyes blinking down at his boots.

The last-named writer, while admitting that Sainte-Beuve had read everything and forgotten nothing and was an incarnate *Biographie Universelle*, says that he talked like an old woman. This is presumably meant to be cutting, but may nevertheless be true without damaging Sainte-Beuve’s character. His voice was soft and measured, and his conversation was graceful, pointed, and witty, marked by small touches rather than grand phrases, with the claws (as Goncourt says) concealed under the paw of velvet. Sainte-Beuve’s last secretary, Jules Troubat, who was with him eight years and was his residuary legatee and joint-executor, calls his “one of those exquisite sensibilities

<sup>1</sup> L. Nicolardot, *Confession de Sainte-Beuve*. This book is a masterpiece of malice by a “friend” of ten years’ standing.

which take offence at an error of taste, which never pardon a false note." He was fond of the company of cats and women, and always had both in his house to the end of his days. A good deal of scandal was talked about the women, which need not concern us here. The less malicious of his detractors contented themselves with sneers at the brainlessness of these members of his household, and this seems to have been a justifiable charge. But at least the same could not be said of the only two hostesses whose houses he frequented; for they were La Païva and the Princess Mathilde. Among men his closest intimates included Prince Napoleon, Renan, Gautier, and others, who were the constant visitors of one or both of these ladies. We have heard how the Princess resented having to share her great men with "*cette fille.*"

The sitting of the Princess Mathilde for her portrait in the Rue Mont-Parnasse was swiftly followed by the admission of Sainte-Beuve to the inner circle of her friends. In the first half of 1863 the Goncourts met him both in the Rue de Courcelles and at Saint-Gratien. One scene at the latter place in June, described by the younger brother, shows on how familiar a footing hostess and guest stood. After dinner one night Sainte-Beuve was complaining of his old age. Why, he had never been younger, retorted some one. "That's true!" exclaimed

the Princess. "He has cut himself clear of a lot of nonsense and wrong ideas. I much prefer what he is doing now. Don't you agree, gentlemen, that his articles nowadays are as free as—I've got it, he wallows in the truth!" Sainte-Beuve blushed. "*Mon Dieu*, yes!" he said. "That's the true criticism, to say just what comes into your head."

He was perhaps somewhat disconcerted by her frank exposure of just what came into her head on this occasion. But he was wont to admire this characteristic of her speech and to urge her to make further use of her gift of rapid understanding. In particular he desired her to keep some sort of diary, which might one day become a book. "That is a good resolution you have made," he says in a letter of September, 1863, soon after the above-mentioned visit to Saint-Gratien, "to commit to paper some reminiscences, to give effect in this direction, too, to your power of full and sincere insight and expression. Write as you talk. . . ." He recurs to this idea a year later: "I hope that you have not abandoned the idea of putting on paper what you know, especially round about a certain epoch of historical importance. Don't neglect this task. Another page from time to time, now a recital of actual fact, now a portrait sketched from life, and some day we shall have one of those books which authors do not turn out and on which time sets an infinite value."

Later in life the Princess Mathilde made some attempt to do as Sainte-Beuve had advised her. In March 1874 Edmond de Goncourt, calling on Claudius Popelin in Paris, is told by him that he has been trying to persuade the Princess to write her memoirs, for if she does not, some pretended memoirs will surely be invented and attributed to her. "At last she has set about it. When she has finished a small piece she is very pleased, and admires herself like a child for it." Popelin fetched out part of the work, and began to read it to Goncourt, who admits that in it the Princess has not ill preserved her spoken language and her peculiar manner of portraying people, mingling physical details with moral characteristics. Unfortunately the fate of these memoirs is unknown.<sup>1</sup>

If the Princess did not accept Sainte-Beuve's advice about committing her thoughts to paper early enough to submit the result to him, she at least consulted him when, as occasionally happened, she was called on to fill a public rôle. Once, for instance, it fell to her to visit the institution at Ecouen of the "Daughters of the Legion of Honour" and to make a speech to them. She wrote to her friend, enclosing what

<sup>1</sup> Popelin denied that he had any hand in the composition of the memoirs. He only copied them out for the Princess, as she could not recopy her own notes. Baron Lombroso remarks on the similarity of her handwriting to the great Napoleon's; and the illegibility of that is well known—though in his case attributed partly to a desire to conceal his bad spelling.

she proposed to say and asking for criticism. His reply is very flattering. "The speech is simple and perfect. There are but two points where I would make an alteration." Having mentioned the points, he continues: "You see, Princess, how I turn pedant and writing-master as soon as I am given the chance! I was born to be a professor of elocution, and I certainly missed my vocation in not following that line. But you have the simplicity of the right-minded, which is becoming to the great."

It would not be just, on account of the adulation (as it may seem) of this last sentence and of like passages in his "*Portrait of the Princess*," to join with those who accuse Sainte-Beuve of being a flatterer with a motive. In the relations between the genius and the noble patron, especially when the noble patron is a beautiful woman, there is always an element which offends the strict sense of fitness. The ungrateful client, even, seems more conscious of his dignity than the client who conveys his gratitude in pretty phrases. Often the latter is regarded as the clever knave eulogising the vain fool, the former as the superior man who resists the specious attempt to buy his services. Really, however, the thankfulness of the genius to his patron is in itself a thing to be thankful for, and its flourishes should meet a lenient eye. Mæcenas deserves his praise. To tell him that he is rich

is crude; that he is discriminating, reflects merely on your own merits; wherefore it remains to dwell upon his other claims to your regard.

Sainte-Beuve had good reason to be grateful to his Princess. She loaded him with gifts on every occasion when she could find an excuse and at the prompting of kind caprice. His letters are full of acknowledgments. Here are some mats, worthy of Persia or Turkey, on which he scarcely dares put his feet, but at least can let his thankful eyes rest. Here are a clock for his desk, an embroidered quilt, a king among armchairs, a lamp, a large carpet. "My house is furnished by you; I cannot walk, nor look, nor turn, nor sit down except in the midst of presents from you." Here is a photograph of herself, here a water-colour copy by her of Chardin's "*Madame Lenoir*" (or Geoffrin). Here are some Mandarin oranges, which he had never eaten before, pineapples, flowers, and first-fruits of spring. "Do you know that my work-room is like a little temple now? It becomes difficult for me not to proclaim the name of the goddess to whom it is, as it were, dedicated." Here, too, are boxes for the theatre, presents for his *bonnes petites gens*, invitations for friends of his to the Rue de Courcelles, favours obtained for writers in whom he is interested. "*Notre-Dame de Saint-Gratien*" cannot be wearied by his requests to her on

behalf of others, whether she knows them or not.

Then there are the entry to her *salon*, one of the two homes for men of letters in Paris—had she heard him say that the other was Madame de Païva's, she would not have been pleased—and the holiday visits, for which he could but too rarely find the time, to her beautiful country-house at Enghien. More prized still are her return-calls to the Rue Mont-Parnasse, that home which some of Sainte-Beuve's visitors, such as the Goncourts, declared so cold and *bourgeois*, so lacking in personality, were it not for the books and papers everywhere in cases, on tables, and piled against the walls. Here, in the bedroom-study where he passed so many hours of his laborious life, he received her like all his best-loved guests, and seated her before him in the green repp armchair, which held at times many of the most illustrious men in France. For the honour of her calls his letters are full of appreciation. After one of them, near the end of 1865, he writes: “I have forgotten to tell you that no single trace of you, in that charming visit with which you honoured me in this room, so full of you and your gifts, has escaped attention, and Troubat, as he sat down in his place the next morning, cried out: ‘Why, who has been sitting here and writing? *This is a good pen!*’ He has seized on the autograph and is proud of the honour. Since

then he has written more beautifully than ever."

Sainte-Beuve has been laughed at for one way of showing his pleasure at the Princess's kindness to him. He sent her, at three different times, the complete works of Plato, Cicero, and Seneca. What a possession for a beautiful woman, says a scoffer. But then it must be remembered that he estimated her intelligence highly. He found her a tutor, Zeller, to instruct her in contemporary history two hours daily, and once invited himself to her house before dinner to read to her privately his *Discours sur la Prix de Vertu*, which he was to deliver at the annual meeting of the Academy. What has a beautiful woman to do with lessons in contemporary history or discourses on the reward of virtue? it might be asked.

The best reply, however, to all criticisms of Sainte-Beuve's attitude towards the Princess Mathilde is to be found in the *Lettres à la Princesse*. No one who is not entirely prejudiced against the writer can fail to appreciate that the friendship which they convey is an elevated and inspiring sentiment. Sainte-Beuve betrays a few foibles<sup>1</sup>—what good letter-writer

<sup>1</sup> One of these was his habit of telling the Princess about his ailments, somewhat frankly at times. He apologises on one occasion—"Princess, I am forgetting myself when I talk to you of my troubles in the very midst of the ease which you have procured for me." But in December 1866 (when, indeed, he had cause for concern, since a warning of his fate had been given

does not?—but sycophancy and disingenuousness do not enter into the composition of these.

him) he was writing: “On Thursday afternoon and the following night I had an internal mishap so serious as to oblige me to call Ricord at once. He looked to what was wrong, and I do not suffer much, but here I am again put in the invalid class, and for a graver reason, I feel, than before. Let us hope,” he continues, “that I shall still be able to return to that pleasant life of which the Princess was the charm and the honour.”

## CHAPTER XVI

### SAINTE-BEUVÉ : THE END OF A FRIENDSHIP

FROM the mass of Sainte-Beuve's correspondence with the Princess Mathilde it would be possible to select a large number of passages which throw light on the opinions of the recipient as well as the writer of the letters. We must confine ourselves to a few points, however, where some of the Princess's traits to which attention has already been called seem to receive useful illustration.

Although it was upon a question of the permissible amount of opposition to the Government that their friendship was ultimately wrecked, Sainte-Beuve and the Princess were for the most part harmonious in their views of the right policy for the Empire. They agreed in deplored the influence of the Empress Eugénie as it steadily grew during the second half of Napoleon's reign. As early as January, 1863, Sainte-Beuve felt sufficiently sure of his ground to write to the Princess :

"I saw Mérimée at the Academy yesterday, and he told M. Lebrun, before me, that he



SAINTE-BEUVÉ.



had dined at Saint-Cloud on Tuesday, and had been charged by the Emp\*\*\*\* to tell M. Fould to take no step before seeing her ; and consequently . . . This makes me, like yourself, Princess, sad ; for I am, if only one of the humblest rowers, in Cæsar's barque, and I like to see the flag carried high and brave."

Only a few days later he permits himself to make another criticism of the Empress, this time not in connection with politics. Having mentioned George Sand's opinion of the newly-published *Salammbô*, he continues : "Another great, a very great lady admires *Salammbô*, and is much taken up with it. Is not this right and natural ? Does it not agree with the study of fashions and of ultra-French discoveries with which her pretty head gets at times infatuated ? "

We hear in the *Journal des Goncourt* that Sainte-Beuve at this period was little inclined to spare the Empress. At one of the celebrated dinners at Magny's in the Quartier-Latin, which united fortnightly so many men of genius, the discussion turned on Marie-Antoinette, in whom the Court, and particularly Eugénie, were lately exhibiting much interest. Sainte-Beuve attacked the Queen's character fiercely, showing a sort of personal hatred for her. He confided in Jules de Goncourt's ear that he had an idea of writing what he thought of her, with the intention of being thereby disagreeable to the Empress. Goncourt is often accused of em-

broidering on the truth. An undoubtedly authentic story is that told by Sainte-Beuve's secretary, Troubat, of his master's only visit to Compiègne. This took place at the end of the same year, 1863. On the guest's introduction to Eugénie she began to praise Victor Hugo enthusiastically to him and asked if he could repeat any of his verse. Sainte-Beuve, whose parting with Hugo had been in painful circumstances, began to recite,

*Madame, autour de vous tant de grâce étincelle,*

but his memory failed him, and he broke down. On his return home he sent to Compiègne a copy of the poem in *Feuilles d'Automne*, and to his secretary remarked: "The Empress juggles with words, outstretched on her long chair. They spring from her mouth, like a jet of water rising and falling."

Sainte-Beuve excused himself from accepting further invitations to Compiègne, and indeed as far as possible avoided the Imperial Court, of whose attitude towards himself he writes somewhat bitterly to the Princess in a letter of March 1865. He had already attempted to explain to her in conversation one evening at her own house that it only remained for him to accept the situation as past remedy. He was sure that he was neither looked on nor treated as a friend, and that any one else would have resented the neglect still more than he had

done. The wise man does not turn his eyes in directions where it is useless to look. To himself it was painful rather than agreeable to meet with such glances and questions as he received in certain quarters, and he asked the Princess's permission to refuse an invitation to dinner, which she apparently wished him to accept. His next letter shows that she had not been pleased with his request, but he expressed a hope that soon he would have the opportunity of explaining matters more clearly to her, face to face and alone. The misunderstanding was soon removed. In the letter which follows we find Sainte-Beuve declaring his joy to be exceeding and quite unphilosophical, his gratitude that of a man of twenty. "You know whither the first transport will carry me? I must have the honour of laying it at your feet to-night!"

It was not, indeed, merely a misunderstanding that had been cleared up. There is no precise date to the last-mentioned letter, but as its place in the correspondence seems to assign it to the month of April we may assume that it was written after Sainte-Beuve had heard that he was at last nominated to the Senate. The story of his disappointments with regard to this honour is one to inspire sympathy in all who can appreciate the feelings of a sensitive man. In 1857, according to his secretary at the time, Jules Levallois, the mention of a

rumour that he was soon to be senator drove him into a passion. "Never repeat such follies to me!" he cried. "Do you think I wish to dishonour myself?" His opinion was that the senatorship should be the reward of certain services to the State which he did not consider he had so far rendered. A writer, even if he devoted himself only to poetry and works of the imagination, might earn this reward by a sufficient proof of his talent. When he seemed to himself to have fulfilled the condition laid down by himself, and still time passed without his nomination, his impatience and ill-humour were as great as had been his wrath at the premature suggestion in 1857. In the autumn of 1864 he was in high hopes of obtaining the distinction, and two of his letters to the Princess Mathilde after it had been again refused are eloquent of mortification. In this letter he admits—we can hardly suppose that he is merely pretending out of politeness—that the support of the Princess encouraged him to be specially sanguine on this occasion. The decree of October 5, appointing several others, including Nieuwerkerke, senators, found him in Paris and the Princess at Saint-Gratien. He wrote to her on the 12th, begging her earnestly never to interfere again on his behalf in the matter, grateful though he was for her help in the past. He would think no more of the Senate, and wished never to talk with her again.

about it. Two days later, however, having no doubt heard from her in the interval, he wrote once more :

" It is impossible for me not to begin by telling you that I know and understand all that you have done and tried to do ; you have my entire gratitude. But must I tell you the truth ? I am discontented and feel mortified. I do not understand why literature, which I represented in this instance, should always be put off, set aside, made last of all. There was a way, it was possible, but the chance was not taken. A man is being sent to the first body in the State who ought to have been sent to the asylum. What value after this can one attach to the distinction ? There remains only the advantages. . . . I look on myself as having received a trifling insult. Public opinion pointed to me ; I am now asked questions on all sides. I answer with restraint, but, I must confess to you, as a man who wishes henceforward to dispense with the honours that have to be snatched at and the marks of grace that are so ungraciously bestowed. We men of letters have our own peculiar temperaments and points of honour, which are inseparable from us.

" I have but one idea now, Princess, to preserve in this situation a precious friendship, not only untouched by the shadow of harm, but also, if possible, increased in warmth of

esteem. Still, as far as the Master is concerned, he has alienated me personally. I was your candidate, Princess, and I should have been his."

Alluding to Nieuwerkerke, Sainte-Beuve adds: "As for our friend, I have congratulated and do congratulate him with all my heart. This nomination, apart from its being deserved, shows sense. In view of what has occurred for a year past, it is a pledge, a mark of approval of the past and a promise of renewed favour in the future."

The Princess declined to give up her efforts on behalf of Sainte-Beuve, though she now continued them without his consent; and in April 1865 she had the satisfaction of seeing him senator. Hence his quite unphilosophical joy and his gratitude of the man of twenty.<sup>1</sup> As the Emperor was just on the point of leaving for his visit to Algeria, Sainte-Beuve's presentation to him in his new capacity was deferred until after his return. On June 15 the Princess received a letter from her friend expressing some satisfaction over the interview

<sup>1</sup> The Princess's aid in securing him his senatorship is gratefully recalled by Sainte-Beuve in January, 1866, when forced to rest in bed after an operation: "A thought comes to me amid this interruption of my work, that this peace upon my pillow, thanks to which I have time to grow well, I owe to my senatorship, and the senatorship I owe to —. This may not be a politic way of looking at things, but your Highness will pardon me for it, since to feel thus is dear to me."

A place in the Senate brought with it £1,200 a year.

the day before. Now, in his edition of the *Lettres à la Princesse*, Troubat says that Sainte-Beuve only on one occasion in his life had a private conversation with Napoleon III., who informed him then that he always read his articles in the *Moniteur*—though at the time the Monday articles had been transferred from the *Moniteur* to the *Constitutionel* two or three years ago. If the Emperor made this bad blunder in receiving the new senator, the latter was not so annoyed as to feel obliged to write to his gracious patroness about it.

During the Emperor's visit to Algeria an opportunity occurred for Sainte-Beuve to show his political agreement with the Princess Mathilde. Napoleon III. had left the Empress Eugénie Regent, with a Privy Council of which Prince Napoleon was Vice-President. The Prince had to some extent lived down his ill name since the Aumale affair, though in any case his closeness to the Throne made it almost necessary for him to accept this responsible position. But he soon relieved the Empress of his unwelcome counsels. A statue of Napoleon Bonaparte, with his four brothers about him, had been erected at Ajaccio, and the Prince was sent over to unveil it. He made an eloquent speech, in which unfortunately the views expressed were not those of the Empire, but his own, which made the ideal government a republic presided over by a Napoleon—such

as himself. Consternation followed, and an urgent message was despatched to the Emperor in Algeria, asking what was to be done. The Imperial answer was prompt. Dated from Algiers on May 23, it was published in the *Moniteur* four days later, though addressed personally to the Prince. If that bold orator had been under any illusion that he might be leading his cousin along the right path, he was now entirely undeceived. His programme, he was told, could only be of use to enemies of the Government, and the letter concluded : "It is clear to the sight of all men that it was to check intellectual anarchy, that detestable enemy of true liberty, that the Emperor [Napoleon] established, first in his own family, and then in his government, that severe system of control which allowed but one will and one execution. Henceforward I shall not depart from this same line of action."

Prince Napoleon resigned his place on the Privy Council at once. The Princess Mathilde's indignant sympathy with him can only be measured by the letter which Sainte-Beuve wrote in answer to one of hers on the subject. "I was grieved," he says, "and your comment is just. The letter is 'excessive' in itself; its insertion in the *Moniteur* I fear to be irreparable. He would not have done this had he been in Paris. He obeyed his first impulse, and no one restrained him. . . . Only two papers rejoice

over the letter and the blow it deals—the two Royalist papers, the *Gazette* and the *Union*. There is an Oriental proverb which says, ‘Do you wish to know if you have committed a fault? Look in your enemy’s eyes.’” As for Prince Napoleon’s speech, Sainte-Beuve agreed with what the Princess had said to him about it. It was good that there should be more than one aspect of the Napoleonic interpretation of affairs. “The Prince represents an interpretation that is democratic, patriotic, 1815, True Blue. There may be shades of Blue. But *White* can never be one of them.”

He was sure the Emperor would regret his action. “Then, Princess—and it will be soon—you can intervene; you can already do so with your brother. Very probably he will be pressed, will be *begged*, to keep the presidency of the Universal Exhibition, with which he alone is capable of coping. My advice would be that, after an honourable resistance, he should yield, that he should allow the Emperor to regret his action and repair it in part—in short, that he should not bar the way to a reconciliation.”

Sainte-Beuve over-rated the Emperor’s placability, for the Prince was never again allowed to occupy a prominent place in public life, and his share in the Imperial politics was henceforward confined to subterranean work. As for the Princess Mathilde, her interest in politics

after this is shown by the occasion of her quarrel with Sainte-Beuve, but in very little else of which we hear, until quite late in her life, when the Dreyfus affair arose.

The famous quarrel is a melancholy page in the stories of both the parties to it—in Sainte-Beuve's because he was victim to terrible physical sufferings when it befell, in the Princess's because the indignation to which she gave way made her unintentionally cruel. In December 1866 Sainte-Beuve first discovered the seriousness of his malady—which was stone—but his letters continued to be cheerful, and his work suffered less interruption than his recreations and his visits. His condition, however, is clearly revealed in the description by Jules de Goncourt of the dinner-party given by him to the Princess Mathilde on November 14, 1867. The other guests were Madame Espinasse, Charles Giraud, Nieuwerkerke, Sainte-Beuve's doctor Phillips, and the Goncourt brothers. They were received in a room on the ground-floor all white and gilt, with brand-new jonquil-yellow furniture such as a dealer supplies to a *cocotte*, says Jules.<sup>1</sup> The Princess arrived, very gay, and determined to be amused, as though she were at a bachelor-party. She insisted on carving for all. Sainte-Beuve, on the other

<sup>1</sup> Part of the decorations, at least, was a gift from the Princess (see Sainte-Beuve's letter of November 8), though Goncourt was not aware of this.

hand, looked like the head-waiter at a funeral feast ; he was very old and broken, and could eat nothing. Champagne proved of no avail, laughter froze, and the Princess herself grew sad and serious. Conversation in the *salon* afterwards kept a melancholy trend. Sainte-Beuve spoke about his medical days, and the doctor about operations, while all thought of the host's approaching end.

The sufferer grew less and less able to get about, and so saw less of the Princess. On September 22, 1868, the last but two of his letters to her speaks of "the happy visit" he had received from her, which had raised him up for a time, though gradually he had sunk back to his ordinary level. A few days afterwards a brief and unimportant note followed, and then, three months and a half later, the letter of farewell. What happened in the interval must now be described.

At the beginning of 1867 Sainte-Beuve, for the second time in his career, transferred his Monday articles from the *Constitutionel* to the *Moniteur*, obtaining a very advantageous agreement from Dalloz, director of the *Moniteur*. The relaxation of the Press laws, which accompanied the building up of the "Liberal Empire," led to the *Moniteur*, towards the end of 1868, ceasing to be the official organ of the Government, and its staff was disbanded. Dalloz wished Sainte-Beuve to remain, but he had

taken a very clerically minded partner, Pointel,<sup>1</sup> who insisted on blue-pencilling the first Monday article after the change, because it contained incidentally certain criticisms of the Bishop of Montpellier. Such a thing had not happened to Sainte-Beuve in forty years of journalism. On December 30 he wrote Dalloz, resigning his position, and concluding his letter with the words, "To the devil with fanatics!" He had received repeated offers from the *Temps* to join its staff. The *Temps* was Liberal rather than Red, and claimed impartiality, but distinctly belonged to the Opposition. The advantage which its columns offered to Sainte-Beuve (who always refused to call himself a Liberal) was that he would be free to express his opinions. He had also been invited to join the new *Journal Officiel*, but said that he could not feel free on a paper with an emblem at the top. "One has to be so careful when one marches under a banner," he remarked. He accepted now the offer of the *Temps*, and sent off to it his article as originally written for the *Moniteur*. The *Temps* printed it on January 4, 1869.

On the previous day, which was a Sunday,

<sup>1</sup> The same gentleman who, as editor of an illustrated paper, asked an artist noted for his drawing of horses for some pictures for his paper. The artist set to work. "What are you doing for me?" asked Pointel soon after. "Why, some horses." "Horses!" cried Pointel, and he took two feverish turns up and down the room. "Horses lead to women, women to the ruin of family life. No horses in my paper!"

the Princess Mathilde had paid a visit to the Rue Mont-Parnasse, but nothing had been said then about Sainte-Beuve's transference of his work to the *Temps*. On Monday afternoon the Princess's carriage was heard again at the door. The secretary, Troubat, and a visitor who was present in the study retired and left the others alone. Shortly after Sainte-Beuve summoned Troubat to keep the Princess company, as his malady was paining him and he was obliged to withdraw. She was standing up, waving her muff, and looking like a picture of Napoleon I. in his wrath. She first attacked the *Temps*, then declared that she and her brother had put Sainte-Beuve into the Senate. Troubat protested that his employer had done nothing unworthy of his senatorship, and that there must be both right and left wings to the Empire. "M. Sainte-Beuve was a vassal of the Empire!" she cried excitedly. "There are no longer vassals, only citizens!" answered Troubat, raising his voice in his turn. The argument became hotter still, when suddenly Sainte-Beuve opened the door and said, "Come, Troubat, you seem to be speaking rather loudly." The secretary retired again, and soon afterwards heard the Princess go out, slamming the doors after her. He at once reported the word "vassal" to Sainte-Beuve, who turned pale and said, "They shall see whether I am a vassal!"

This is Troubat's story.<sup>1</sup> There is also a version in the *Journal des Goncourt*. The younger brother writes on January 6 that, when he called upon the Princess and told her he had seen Sainte-Beuve, whom he found weary, preoccupied, and sad, she made no answer, but beckoned to him to follow her into the room where she was wont to walk up and down in her confidential talk. Here she broke out in a torrent of words :

"Sainte-Beuve, I will not see him again, never ! The way he has acted towards me . . . he ! Why, it was about him that I quarrelled with the Empress. . . . And after all that he has had through me ! On my last visit to Compiègne, he had made three requests of me, and I got the Emperor to grant two of them. And what did I ask of him ? I didn't ask him to sacrifice a conviction. I asked him not to enter upon a contract with the *Temps*, and on behalf of Rouher I offered him everything. . . . He might have been on the *Liberté* with Girardin, that was still possible, it was his own proper party. . . . But the *Temps*, our personal enemies, who insult us daily ! . . . Oh ! he's a wicked man. Six months ago I wrote to Flaubert, 'I am afraid that Sainte-Beuve is going to play some trick on us.' "

She went on bitterly : "He wrote to me on New Year's Day that all the ease and comfort

<sup>1</sup> *Souvenirs du Dernier Secrétaire de Sainte-Beuve*, pp. 350-2.

which he had about him in his illness were due to me. No, that isn't the right way to act!" Suffocating, straining with both hands at the neck of her dress, gasping with sobs, she protested that she was not now talking as a princess, but as a woman, a woman. She caught Goncourt by the lapels of his coat, shook him, as though to emphasise her words, and cried, "Really, Goncourt, isn't this undeserved?"

Her eyes searched his fiercely. Then she walked away, her white silk train sweeping behind her, and came back again to take up the attack. Her fancied wrongs as a woman drove her to fury. "I have been to dinner at his house, I have sat in the chair where Madame [? de Païva] has sat! But I told him to his face, 'Your house is only fit for bad women, and I have been to it.' . . . Oh, I was hard! I said to him too, 'What are you but a worn-out old man?' . . ."

More in the same strain followed, according to the Goncourt account.<sup>1</sup> But we need not dwell upon the utterances of the temporarily frenzied Princess, if indeed they were her actual utterances and not (as Troubat suggests)

<sup>1</sup> Goncourt says that a week after this scene the Princess remarked, "You know, between a woman like myself and *un homme incomplet* like him no true friendship could ever exist." This cruel insult is the burden of Nicolardot's book, to which reference has been made before. Nicolardot has a remarkable theory that only good sons of the Church are really possessed of virility.

an exaggeration of what she said, prompted by some personal malice of the Goncourt brothers over Sainte-Beuve's omission to pay them the respect which they thought due to themselves. Her final remark as she left the house is said to have been, "I wish you had died last year, and then you would have left me at least the memory of a friend!"

The last item in the *Lettres à la Princesse* is dated January 17, 1869, and runs as follows:

"PRINCESS,—

"A fortnight has passed.

"I searched and questioned myself in vain, I can discover no personal wrong which I have done your Highness.

"You accostomed me, Princess, to a very different kind of friendship—so different that I could only consider the interview of Monday as an extraordinary accident, something brought about not by you, but by another.

"As for me, I put the seal on after Sunday's visit. The book closed for me that day at half-past five. Will it ever open again?

"I know what I owe for so many kindnesses, so many remembrances, so many signs of friendship, of which the evidences surround me and will always be about me. The astonishment which seized me on Monday, and which it is so hard to shake off, will pass. All that went

before lives and will live. In this, at least, I shall guard the faith which is so often lacking in me otherwise. Even when I can no longer hope, I shall still wait, and a secret voice will murmur deep within me: No, it is impossible!

"I lay at your feet, Princess, the homage of my respectful and unchangeable attachment."

There was no answer to this letter, and the writer never saw his Princess again. Three months after the quarrel, however, she sent a friend to the Rue Mont-Parnasse to attempt a reconciliation. This we are told by Troubat; and also that Sainte-Beuve's answer was that he was engaged on some articles about Jomini for the *Temps*, and Saint-Gratien was too far. A reconciliation actually took place when the old critic lay on his death-bed in October 1869. The Princess telegraphed to Troubat for news, which he sent by post. She acknowledged the letter by another telegram to the dying man himself. Sainte-Beuve then dictated a long telegram in reply. The Princess sent Zeller, who had come into her service through Sainte-Beuve, and to him was dictated, in a failing voice, a last letter to be carried to her. This does not appear in the *Lettres à la Princesse*, and perhaps was not returned by her with the rest.

It is somewhat disillusioning that Sainte-

Beuve's death was followed by a squabble over the correspondence with the Princess Mathilde. He had left instructions that there should be an exchange of letters. The Princess, however, wanted hers back without returning his, feeling perhaps that she had revealed herself too much in her writings for an *Altesse Impériale*. ("If they ever rummage among our letters, M. de Sainte-Beuve," she had once said to him jestingly, "they will find that we have held out a hand to quite a lot of rascals.") Troubat insisted on carrying out the instructions of the will. Lawyers were called in, negotiations continued for several days, and the affair threatened to come into court. At length, however, this catastrophe was averted by the friendly arbitration of Adert, editor of the *Journal de Genève*, to whom Troubat had appealed in his distress, and an amicable exchange took place.

There are many details in the story of this end of a friendship which we could but wish away, for the sake of the Princess Mathilde. It is satisfactory, at least, that it was not she who refused an advance, for this reduces her cruelty. And her cruelty was, as has been said above, unintentional. She forgot the state of her victim when she yielded to her anger at what she considered his desertion, his treachery. Sainte-Beuve wrote of her, in the "Portrait"—and he might have remembered this when he

told her he could not see what wrong he had done her—"She feels the need of confidence in her dealings. 'I need to believe in the people I see,' she has said. . . . Good faith is a marked characteristic of her throughout." Sainte-Beuve was, as a matter of fact, perfectly justified according to ordinary standards in writing for the *Temps*. Prince Napoleon had no disapproval for the step, and was during the last months of Sainte-Beuve's life a closer friend than ever.

"The loss of this great philosophical writer, this honest man, this friend," he wrote to Troubat, "caused me profound sorrow. . . . Had it been possible, I should have hastened to Paris for his funeral, but unhappily I could not arrive in time [he was at his house in Switzerland]. I should have followed in mournful sympathy the modest procession, which became great through the merits of him who was being carried to burial and the friends who paid to him their last respects."

To the Princess, however, the smart of the wound she had received in one of her deepest feelings was too acute to allow her to take at once the step which her general generosity of character might have led us to expect. One of the Goncourts writes that, when the just anger (as he calls it) of the Princess had worked itself off, she forgot her grievances against her old friend, and only remembered the charm

of his talk, of his wit, of his companionship; she became a warm friend of his memory, which she defended even against the Goncourts themselves. Let us hope—but indeed we must feel sure—that some regret for her hasty action of January 1869 mingled with her reminiscences of the days that could never come again.

## CHAPTER XVII

### UNDER THE LATER EMPIRE

DURING the later years of the reign of Napoleon III. the public events affecting the life of the Princess Mathilde were few. We hear of no comment from her upon the death in 1865 of the Duke of Morny, as the Emperor's half-brother had at last become. Since the day when she first invited him to her house, and thus set the seal publicly on the family's acceptance of its illegitimate offshoot, they had always been on amicable terms to the extent of receiving one another on gala nights. But here the friendship stopped short. There was no intimacy possible between the mistress of the *salon* in the Rue de Courcelles and the "evil genius of the Second Empire." As for Morny's wife, she was a Russian, and might therefore have been expected to appeal to the Princess's heart; but they seem never to have been drawn together.

Morny's post as president of the Corps Législatif fell to the other leading illegitimate scion of the Imperial family, Count Alexandre

Walewski. Possibly it was Walewski's strong Polish sympathies, natural to him as the son of Marie Lascynska, which prevented the growth of friendship between him and the Princess. Outwardly she could but admire him for his resemblance to her idol, the great Emperor. ("A very handsome and pleasing young man, being a softened likeness of his father," was Lord Malmesbury's description of him in 1831.) The Countess Walewska his second wife—the first, a daughter of Lord Sandwich, having died as long ago as 1834—was of mixed Italian and Polish blood, being on her father's side a descendant of Macchiavelli, and on her mother's one of the Poniatowskis. On one occasion, to our knowledge, the conversation at Saint-Gratien fell upon her, when she received scant mercy all round. It was in the autumn of 1858, and the Emperor had sent his chamberlain Quirtry to invite his cousin Mathilde on a visit to Saint-Cloud. Quirtry met Viel-Castel and took him with him to the Princess's. They stayed to dinner and spent the rest of the evening in talking scandal. The influence of the Countess Walewska over Napoleon III. was at that time the subject of much discussion at Court, and of course the topic arose now. The Princess pronounced Marianne (the Countess) an utter little *rouée*, who contrived, while intriguing with the Emperor, to make a friend of the Empress. She had, however, a mortal terror of



THE DUKE OF MONY.



her husband, and the Princess was ready to put her hand in the fire if Walewski knew anything about the intrigue. Quirry, with whom Viel-Castel naturally agreed, was certain that Walewski knew very well and said nothing, because it paid him to keep his mouth shut. The Princess refused to be convinced of the husband's guilt, but proceeded to relate a very frank tale about the wife and the Emperor. During this edifying conversation the "old fairy," Madame de Fly, and the Countess Vimercati sat silent. As so often happened, the presence of Viel-Castel seems to have corrupted his surroundings.

Arsène Houssaye, speaking of the conversation which used to be heard in the Princess's home, says: "At her table, while giving her guests the fullest rein, she keeps them from getting too close to dangerous ground. There is perfect liberty of speech, but that speech must be French, not Gallic (*paroles françaises et non gauloises*).". Again the same writer says: "She is too much of a princess to wish to put the conversation into white ties, even upon days of ceremony. Provided that one knows how to tell a tale or make a jest she shows no affectation; she is one of those who think that the French, if not the Gallic, wit is the health of the soul." To most readers, probably, the conversation on this occasion about the Walewskis and Napoleon III. will appear to have deserved

the epithet *gaulois*, though allowance must be made for the fact that it reaches us through the medium of Viel-Castel.

The Countess Walewska was a very pretty woman, whose good looks caused her frequently to be chosen, with the Princess Mathilde, the Princess Anna Murat, and other leading beauties, to take part in the costume-ballets which were the chief features of the more splendid State balls. Her power with the Emperor was undoubtedly, but it could not be said that she abused it, her chief concern appearing to be to keep her husband's position secure. The Princess Mathilde was speaking truly when she said that "Marianne" contrived to make a friend of the Empress. Eugénie, indeed, showed a great liking for her, and bestowed on her many marks of her favour. A story is told of the Princess Mathilde one day asking her cousin's wife what she had done with a lock of hair cut off the Prince Imperial's head when he was an infant. "Oh, I gave it to Madame Walewska," Eugénie is said to have replied. The question of Walewski's attitude towards his wife's friendship with his master is not one into which we need go here. He was not himself faithful, for he had a son by Rachel. Yet he had no quarrel with his wife, and his death in 1868 was caused by an apoplectic fit following on his helping to carry her, then an invalid, upstairs in a chair.

Many years afterwards, in 1887, we hear of the young Walewskis—the son Charles and his wife, the daughter of General Douay—dining with the Princess Mathilde in the Rue de Berri, when the husband is described as having a cold, determined appearance, and speaking with great clearness and precision.<sup>1</sup> These Walewskis of the younger generation appear again at the Princess's death-bed and funeral.

The marriage in 1865 of the Princess Anna Murat, mentioned above, was one of great family events; for Anna, a far more amiable person than her sister Caroline, was much loved by the Empress, was indeed her most intimate friend both now and in the days of exile, while her husband, Antoine de Noailles, Duke of Mouchy, was not only an agreeable man personally, but was one of those members of the old nobility whom Napoleon III. strove so hard, and usually with such little success, to bring over into his camp. The wedding was celebrated with great pomp in Paris, in the presence of the leading members of the Imperial family. Anna Murat's relations with the Princess Mathilde, either before or after marriage, were never very close, owing largely, no doubt, to her definite adherence to the Empress's party. But State ceremonies brought them often together, and at the grand balls,

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt*, September 4, 1887.

as has been said, they were frequently associated.

The Princess Mathilde, however, was not a great devotee to dancing. As she grew older she went seldom to the ball, and even in her earlier days her attendance seems to have been confined mostly to the Court entertainments and to those fancy-dress assemblies where dancing is not the chief attraction. The well-known story told by Lord Malmesbury, in his memoirs, of the Princess going to the ball at the opening of the Hôtel d'Albe in 1860 as an Egyptian fellah-woman, with her skin unfortunately not dyed all over, presents her in a ridiculous light. We would rather picture her as she appeared at another ball three years earlier, given by the city of Paris to King Maximilian of Bavaria, then on a visit to Fontainebleau. The King came to the dance in a most gorgeous uniform, covered with gold lace. Some critics found the costume more suitable to an operatic tenor than to a king, and the contrast between its brilliance and Maximilian's melancholy face was also the subject of remark. Still, the admiration was general as he opened the ball with the Princess Mathilde, in her elaborately frilled and embroidered robe, wearing on her head the magnificent diamond coronet with which she is shown in her portrait by Giraud.

It was at another ball in the same year, one given by Walewski at the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, that the sentimentally enthusiastic author of *La Cour du Second Empire*, Baron Imbert de Saint-Amand, tells how the Princess Mathilde came “superb in blue damask,” while the Countess Castiglione made her famous appearance as the Queen of Hearts, with the scarlet emblem freely scattered about her attire. The Baron does not add the detail, though other writers have done so, that, as the Countess entered the ball-room, there was a crowd about her, and many of those present stood upon chairs to see the beauty who displayed so much of her person; or that the Empress, complimenting her on her costume, asked her whether one of the hearts had not been placed rather too low. The Princess Mathilde, as we know, was at the time on very friendly terms with the daring Italian countess. We may be sure, however, that it was not the latter’s daring, but her nationality and her kinship to the great Cavour—coupled with her admirable beauty—which made her find such favour in the Princess’s eyes.

But we have wandered from the period with which our chapter began, and must now return to the closing years of the Second Empire, the years in which the historians, writing after the event, have been able to discover so many symptoms of decay, but which to those that lived in them seemed so dazzling and so prosperous. The decay was indeed there, yet the

contemporary observers may well be excused for allowing themselves to be blinded by the outward appearance of soundness when all Europe combined to heap such flattery on France as it did in 1867, the epoch of the Great Exhibition.

This year, of such brilliance for Paris, in spite of the gloom cast by the news of shame and disaster from Mexico, one of the legacies left by the policy of Morny, did not find the Princess Mathilde in great prominence. At the Exposition Universelle she had little to do compared with what fell to her in 1855, when the Empress's indisposition had prevented her from appearing much in public and threw upon the Princess many duties in connection with the Exhibition of that year. Still the season was "prolific in princes and archdukes," as Mérimée wrote—in addition to the Tsar, the Sultan, seven Kings, three Queens, and the heirs-apparent of Great Britain, Russia, and Prussia; and the Emperor's cousin necessarily took her share in the State entertainment of these guests. At the opening of the Exhibition on April 1, at which no less than one hundred thousand people were present, Napoleon and Eugénie were attended on their entry by the Princess Mathilde, the Prince of Orange, whom it pleased Parisian wits to call "Prince Citron," the Grand Duke of Leuchtenberg, and Prince Lucien Murat. At the beginning of June the

gaieties increased with the arrival of the Tsar Alexander II., the Tsarevitch (afterwards Alexander III., father of the present Tsar) and his younger brother, the Grand Duke Vladimir, who were as a matter of course prompt to pay their respects to their kinswoman in the Rue de Courcelles.

The first grand spectacle offered to these visitors was the gala performance at the Opera, when we read of the Imperial box being occupied by the Tsar seated between Napoleon and Eugénie in the front row, and behind them the Crown Prince Frederick of Prussia, the two Russian princes, the Princess Mathilde, Prince Lucien Murat, the Princes of Hesse and Saxony and the "Tycoon" of Japan. But the height of splendour was reached on June 6, when sixty thousand troops were reviewed in the Bois de Boulogne by the Emperor, accompanied by the Tsar, the King of Prussia, their two heirs, and their ministers, Bismarck and Gortschakoff. The Princess Mathilde and the other noble ladies watched the proceedings from stands on the racecourse. The Princess returned home enthusiastic, and next day, calling on Sainte-Beuve, exclaimed to his secretary: "How strong we are! M. Troubat, did you see the review yesterday? It was splendid!" She did not, it would seem, make mention of an event which nearly marred the magnificence of the day, when, as the Tsar was driving away with

the Emperor Napoleon from the Bois, the Pole Berezowski fired a pistol at him. Yet we may be certain that her strong pro-Russian and anti-Polish sympathies made her full of indignation over the incident.

The Crown Prince of Prussia brought with him to Paris his little son, aged eight; but we do not hear whether the Princess Mathilde helped to amuse in any way the future Kaiser Wilhelm. Nor do we find her name coupled with that of the Emperor Francis Joseph, who arrived only in October, having been prevented from coming in June by his visit to Hungary to receive the kingly crown in the cathedral of Buda; and then by the awful news of Maximilian's death at Queretaro, which, however, reasons of State compelled him to mourn for less time than might have been expected. In August the Princess Mathilde had retired to the peace of Saint-Gratien, where Mérimée records paying a visit to her. She told him she was fifty—near her fiftieth year, she meant—but, he adds, “she does not look it in any way.” At Saint-Gratien she remained for the autumn, sitting for her portrait by Hébert, amid a house-party which included the Gabriellis, the Primo-lis, and Madame Benedetti. Benedetti himself was now France's ambassador to the Court of Berlin, and his wife spent much of her time in the two houses of her friend.

So the Princess's days went on for the most



PRINCE WILLIAM OF PRUSSIA.  
(The present Kaiser) in 1867.



THE PRINCESS MATHILDE.  
(From a photograph.)



part in a peaceful backwater untroubled by the cares of the outer world. At the end of 1867 she celebrated in the Rue de Courcelles an event to which she had been looking forward for some months, the opening of her new *salon-serre* for the inspection of her guests. We shall hear again of this idea of combining conservatory and saloon when we come to the description of the Princess's later house in the Rue de Berri. Now on Christmas Day, 1867, she asked a select company to spend the evening in the newest addition to the pleasures of her Paris home. They found their hostess arrayed in one of the costumes in which they admired her most, and she led them delightedly into the conservatory. Beautiful exotic flowers were everywhere about, electric lights sprang out of masses of foliage, the walls were covered with deep red hangings, and some of the choicest furniture which she had been able to buy from all parts of the world was disposed about the floor.

Now we come to a fresh eulogist of the hostess who never found anything that was beautiful too good to set before her guests. Among those who made the Princess Mathilde's acquaintance first during the closing years of the Empire was François Coppée. In 1866, at the age of twenty-four years, he had a clerkship at the Ministry of War, and had published but a few verses, which had secured him, however, the notice of Gautier and Sainte-Beuve. The ac-

ception of a poem by *L'Artiste*, to which Catulle Mendès had recommended him to take it, brought him further attention—from Agar the great tragic actress, who suggested to him that he should write a duologue for her benefit at the Odéon in the following winter. Coppée set to work in his modest Montmartre home, amid the surroundings so charmingly described by him in his *Souvenirs d'un Parisien*, and the result was *Le Passant*. Agar was pleased with it and took on herself the part of Silvia, assigning that of Zanetto to one of her young comrades at the Odéon, whose name was Sarah Bernhardt.

The performance was a great success, as it could scarcely fail to be with such interpreters. “What,” says the author, “can I say of Sarah, in those days so slight, so slim . . . of Sarah, luckily unpossessed of the haunches and thighs which make the impersonations of male parts usually so unrealistic and indeed so offensive, of Sarah with all the suppleness, the lightness, and the grace of a young man? What admirable talent in both the actresses! What nobility of attitude and gesture, what depth of emotion in my Silvia, what intoxication, what joy, what folly of youthfulness in my Zanetto! Both spoke their lines marvellously well, and it was an infinite pleasure to contrast these two harmonious instruments, the enchanting ‘golden voice’ of Sarah answering the pathetic contralto

of Agar. There is but one word possible to describe the first interpretation of *Le Passant*. It was perfection itself."

Coppée saw the birth of his fame at the Odéon that night. Next day he realised this even better than amid the tumult of applause in the theatre. Camille Doucet called on him in the morning with an announcement that *Le Passant* was to be heard at the Tuilleries, Gautier with an invitation from the Princess Mathilde. A few days later he went in Gautier's company to the Rue de Courcelles, to begin an affectionate friendship with the hostess that lasted until her death, and to enliven her parties with the fireworks of his conversation. In his *Souvenirs* he writes with enthusiasm of his first visits to her : "She was still in enjoyment—but, alas ! not for much longer—of all the privileges of her rank of Imperial Highness. In the sumptuous saloons of her house in the Rue de Courcelles, as also in the pleasant shades of her château at Saint-Gratien, swarmed the official world of the Court, gold-laced generals, ambassadors and ministers covered with orders and ribbons, fair and charming ladies sparkling with diamonds, and also, in their sober black coats, the famous writers and artists of the day. They were all there, or nearly all ; at least as many in number as the wonderful pearls in the Princess's necklace, that famous ornament which was much less precious in her eyes than

the intellectual aristocracy which her grace and goodness had succeeded in attracting to her and keeping at her side."

Coppée's description of the Princess herself is interesting to compare with those which we have already seen. "Although she was approaching her fiftieth year," he says, "the Princess Mathilde preserved a surprising vigour and youth. She was the flower fully blown but in no wise faded. Her appearance then can be realised from Carpeux's bust, that masterpiece of modern sculpture, which represents her with her coronet upon her head, her splendid shoulders rising up from a mantle of fur. Here we have the Imperial carriage of the head, the deep setting of the eyes, the chin already double, but retaining its Napoleonic firmness—the chin of the Emperor at Wagram. But the artist has not been able to transfer to the marble that sincere, frank, and loyal gaze, still less the smile so irresistible in charm, the smile that was at once happy and kind; or, it would be better to say, the smile which so often conveyed, on the Princess's lips, the joy of a kind nature constantly finding expression in deeds and words."

In the summer of 1869, recently recovered from a serious illness, Coppée was invited for a stay of several weeks at Saint-Gratien, where the Princess wished him to build up his strength again, just as we have seen her, though in vain,

endeavour to nurse back to health the stricken Jules de Goncourt; just as, also, she more than once put a room in her country house at the service of the ungrateful Horace de Viel-Castel; just as, in fact, she was always ready to shelter any of her friends who were in need of peace and fresh air to cure or check the progress of their illnesses. At Saint-Gratien was completed the subjugation of Coppée by "this admirable woman, whose mind was so perfect and so quick, whose character was so deliciously amiable, so virile in its sureness, whose heart was so pure and noble." Here he saw her in her studio, with the paint-brush in her strikingly beautiful hand, or walking in her park with her crowd of little dogs, happy in the society of clever men, "always ready to please or help them, eager to learn, listening much, speaking little, and then only to interject in the conversation, in the brief, decided tone of the Bonapartes, just the right word, often amusing and picturesque, never malicious or stupid, always full of common-sense and truth."

Coppée insists upon the difficulty of the Princess's task as hostess in such a society as she grouped about her, the care with which she had to distribute her praises, to soothe and console wounded vanities, to bestow her benefits. From the results could be judged how well she surmounted the difficulty, what

grace and tact and benevolent activity were hers to inspire in the hearts of so many and so different men a sentiment which varied in its tenderness and its depth, but whose superior quality was proved by its surviving, in almost all cases, the misfortunes of her who inspired it.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE DOWNFALL

IN her earlier days the Princess Mathilde had often been accused of holding advanced, even revolutionary, ideas. She had herself at times, half jestingly, spoken of turning Red Republican; and later, by no means in jest, she had complained of the influence upon the Emperor of his wife's reactionary ideas. Unfortunately none of her many friends thought it worth while to record her opinion when confronted with Napoleon's pendulum-swing towards the Liberal Empire. Her treatment of Sainte-Beuve, when he made the relaxation of the Press laws the occasion of the transference of his services to the *Temps*, we have seen. With all her independence of speech she found it hard to understand the beauties of a free and unfettered Press. At the very time of her quarrel with Sainte-Beuve she was suffering sadly over the attacks made upon Nieuwerkerke, who had become, in the words of Jules de Goncourt, the Saint Sebastian of the minor newspapers. He was attacked in his capacity of head of

the Louvre, and there was fear among his friends that he would be thrown to the wolves. He had made one serious mistake on which the enemy seized, when he was misled in purchasing a spurious sixteenth-century "treasure"; and his frequent loans of Louvre pictures for exhibitions elsewhere were strongly condemned. Nieuwerkerke, however, was not important enough as a sacrifice,<sup>1</sup> and it was Rouher and his fellow Ministers who went, to appease the Opposition. The Liberal Empire came into being, and with Ollivier as his adviser Napoleon III. attempted to secure the continuance of his dynasty upon the throne. A few pages of *Viel-Castel* would have been welcome, to show us how "the little Socialists" of the Rue de Courcelles talked with reference to the change. The Goncourt journal is silent.

Upon one incident of the day we may imagine that the Princess had a strong opinion to express. Two days before the Ollivier Ministry took up office at the beginning of January 1870, Prince Pierre Bonaparte was visited in his house at Auteuil by a young journalist who called himself Victor Noir; violent words were exchanged, the Prince fired at the other—in self-defence, he asserted—and Noir was killed. The young man was a worthless blackguard, but Pierre Bonaparte had always been unpopular,

<sup>1</sup> It is true that the formation of a special Ministry of the Fine Arts in early 1870 greatly reduced the importance of his functions.

and the enemies of the Empire seized upon the affair with avidity as a weapon against the whole family. Now Prince Pierre, it will be remembered, was the man who had challenged, fought, and wounded Nieuwerkerke in 1851 for refusing to be his brother's second in a duel with Count Rossi, and ever since then the Princess Mathilde had been at enmity with him. The trouble which he brought upon his whole family must have incensed her highly. It seems from a letter of Prosper Mérimée's that he endeavoured to persuade the Princess to take another point of view. "I have written to the Princess Mathilde," says Mérimée to Panizzi, "and to a certain member of the Empress's household, who will probably show her my letter. I think you might write to Piétri, the Emperor's secretary, and tell him what decent people in England think about the matter." Mérimée obviously considers that decent people in England do not unduly condemn Prince Pierre, for he himself says: "If he were judged as a simple citizen by a jury of petty tradesmen the verdict would undoubtedly be, 'Served him [Victor Noir] right.' But nowadays princes are outside the pale of the law, and I doubt his coming across judges brave enough to acquit him." To Mérimée Pierre Napoleon is "a thoroughly unique mixture of the Roman prince and the Corsican, a very good fellow, but destitute

of brains." He tells a story of how he rode out once in the depth of a snowy night to fetch a doctor for his cholera-stricken valet, and was thrown from his horse, breaking his leg.

Whether Mérimée succeeded in convincing the Princess that she ought to take up an attitude of family solidarity about Prince Pierre's case we do not hear. The trial resulted, contrary to Mérimée's expectation, in the Prince's acquittal on the charge of murder; but he was ordered to pay Noir's family a compensation for his death of twenty-five thousand francs.<sup>1</sup>

There is a record of one political conversation in the Princess Mathilde's *salon* in the momentous year 1870; but the Princess herself does not figure among the speakers. The story is told by Arsène Houssaye. The Princess was giving a large party, and the Emperor was among the guests. He avoided making new acquaintances now, and sought for familiar faces, as was natural in one who had long left youth behind him. He saw Houssaye standing by the wall between Gautier and La

<sup>1</sup> On the day the above two paragraphs were written, the writer came upon a curious echo of the Victor Noir case. Discussing the Calmette affair, a French newspaper raised the question, what became of Noir's *fiancée*? giving as the answer that she was known religiously as Sister Saint-Bruno, and was the Superior of the nuns working in the prison of Saint-Joseph at Lyon until the laicisation of all the French public institutions put an end to her labours there.

Guéronnière, and came up to speak to them. They were discussing the domestic politics of the day, Houssaye and Gautier speaking against and La Guéronnière for the Liberal Empire. Napoleon chaffed Houssaye on his opposition. "Why do you see things so black?" he asked. "I do not see them black, Sire, but red!" was the reply. Napoleon was turning away with an impatient movement, but La Guéronnière detained him, proclaiming the birth of a new era, to the ideas of which all writers should apply their pens. But, it was objected, the Emperor should carry out his ideas with his own faithful friends, such as Rouher ("the Minister who died poor," in the words of an epitaph suggested for him) and Persigny. The new Ministry looked like a power independent of him. The revolutionaries had all bestirred themselves when so much noise was made in the name of liberty. "Liberty," said Houssaye, "is a friend when one knows how to give and take, but an enemy when cast out upon the street!" "Oh, you are making phrases, I see," said the Emperor. "Sire, I have read the *Histoire de César!*" "All this proves, M. Arsène Houssaye," retorted Napoleon, with obvious annoyance, "that no one is pleased, whatever the head of the State may do."

This conversation took place but a little time before the outbreak of the fatal war, yet before any suspicion of coming events crossed the minds

of the world in general. When the spectre arose, the Princess Mathilde was aghast. The same writer whom we have just been quoting, speaking of her anxiety that there should not be a rupture with Prussia, says : “ There are no conspiracies at the Princess’s. She conspired but once, to avert the war of 1870. She remarked to me then, in one of her clean-cut phrases, with reference to her cousin Napoleon III., ‘ Oh, if I could only prevent him conspiring against himself ! ’ ”

The extent of the Princess’s “ conspiracy ” is not clear, though she appears to have written to Germany, to members of her mother’s family, deprecating an appeal to the sword. Her dislike of the idea was sincere and profound. Apart from the German blood in her veins, which made this quarrel peculiarly unwelcome, she was one of those who believed in the motto, *L’Empire, c’est la paix*. The one war which she had advocated was that on behalf of the freedom of Italy ; and even then she had occasional hesitations, as when in 1862 she asked Count Nigra, on the eve of the Emperor’s departure South, whether Italy’s appetite was not perhaps too big when she tried to swallow Rome. A war with Prussia seemed to her uncalled for, and indeed criminal. Here, as in so many things, she was in agreement with her brother. Prince Napoleon was engaged in a cruise along the Norwegian coast, in the

company of Renan, when the rupture occurred. A telegram from the Emperor reached him at Tromsoe, whereon he gave immediate orders to the captain of his yacht to get up full steam. "Where are we bound for, Prince?" asked the captain. "For Bedlam!" was the reply. The Prince was not wont to leave people in doubt as to his views.

If the realisation had been slow in coming that there was to be a war, events moved very quickly in the end. The famous Council of Saint-Cloud was on July 14, on the 26th the Empress Eugénie was appointed Regent during the Emperor's absence, and on the morning of the 28th Napoleon and the Prince Imperial left for the front, neither of them destined ever to see Paris again. The farewell of Napoleon to his cousin Mathilde was also the last occasion on which they were ever to meet. The little prince, going to that "baptism of fire" which was so undeservedly ridiculed a few weeks later, she was to see again at his father's funeral.

During the terrible days of August the Princess Mathilde disappears from our sight. Edmond de Goncourt, prostrated with grief over his brother's death, tells us nothing about her at this time. A few vivid sketches there are in the *Journal* of the agony of Paris, but of the effect of the national disasters upon the Princess not a word. All we know is that, on

the proclamation of the Republic on September 4, she hastened away from Paris as secretly as possible. Much has been made by writers of the bravery of the Princess Clothilde in driving away openly, and last of all, through the streets of Paris, in contrast to the behaviour of the Empress and various members of the Imperial family. But the comparison is unjust, for Clothilde was scarcely in danger even at the hands of a Paris mob. Could the same be said of Eugénie and Mathilde? The dastardly attacks made on them in print showed to what consideration they were thought entitled. But no one attacked the Italian princess. Her unpopular husband was at the time in Florence, having vainly tried to fulfil a mission entrusted to him by his cousin, to secure the aid of the Italian army for France. When the fatal news of Sedan reached Florence, the head of the Italian Cabinet hinted at the envoy's departure. "Oh, so you are packing me off?" said the Prince. "No, no," replied the Minister politely. "Give me my passports," said the Prince. "They shall be ready in an hour"—and the Prince set off to meet his wife.

With the flight from Paris, of which we look in vain for any details, the Princess Mathilde cut herself off from two things which had played a great part in her life for many years, her home in the Rue de Courcelles and her intimacy with Emilion de Nieuwerkerke. It

is curious that the lover apparently stepped out of his place and all was at an end at once. From henceforward it was as though he had never been. It is possible, of course, that there had been an interruption of the friendship before the catastrophe of September 1870, but if so we know nothing of it. What we do know is that while the Princess set off North in September, Nieuwerkerke went South. Soon afterwards we find him established in a luxurious villa at Gattajola, near Lucca. Here he spent most of the remainder of his days. He revisited Paris in 1885, but was not seen at the Princess's house. He was well provided with money, and lived surrounded by art-treasures, devoting special attention to the period of the Italian Renascence. We shall hear mention of his name once, but once only, before his death on January 16, 1892.

By a curious coincidence the same year which saw the end of the Princess Mathilde's *liaison* with Count Nieuwerkerke also left her a widow. In 1870 died the miserable Anatole Demidoff, Prince of San Donato, who had been for so long a wreck and a byword. He seems never to have made any attempt to disobey the order of the Tsar Nicholas I. to avoid the neighbourhood of his wife. The scandalous offer of Jerome to furnish him with proofs of Mathilde's infidelity brought him no advantage. Towards the end of his life he bought Napoleon's villa

on the island of Elba, and turned it into a museum of Napoleonic relics, hoping thereby, it has been suggested, to touch his wife's heart. The Tsar of the day, Alexander II., is reported to have said to him on hearing of this, "What is the use of it *now?*"—for all that remained to Demidoff were his money and his bare life. So the Prince died without seeing again her whom he had once so much wronged. His estate, apart from what was devoted to keeping up the Princess Mathilde's income, went to his nephew Paul, who was already well known in Paris for his wealth, his extravagance, and the tastes which he shared with the rest of his family.

## CHAPTER XIX

### EXILE AND RETURN

THE fugitive Princess, having escaped from the dangers of Paris, first made her way to Dieppe, where Alexandre Dumas the younger put his house at her disposal. From here she proceeded secretly to the Belgian frontier, and in October we find her at Mons. The Princess Caroline Murat, who had escaped to England, was in communication with her, and publishes in *My Memories* four of her aunt's letters written in Mons and one from Brussels in November. In the first, dated October 9, the Princess Mathilde speaks of a visit to the Queen of Holland, who had been even more affectionate to her than of old. As for herself, "I am horribly sad and my heart is broken. I remain here, not knowing where to go and not wishing to leave; besides, I really do not care." An anxious inquiry after "Loulou"—the Prince Imperial—follows. In the other letters from Mons she again asks about the boy, and also about the Emperor, the Empress, and her brother in London. "Have you seen Napoleon? They

say that he spends all his evenings with Madame ——, a pretty pastime!" Not even her great sorrow could close the Princess's ears to scandal about her scapegrace brother.

Princess Caroline had been commissioned to look for a house for her aunt in Brighton, but could find none whose rent was not exorbitant. She wrote that there was one in London which might suit, but at the end of October Mathilde had decided not to visit England. "I do not wish to go away, and after the capitulation of Metz I am awaiting that of Paris. I am sadder than ever; there is nothing left but our complete ruin, and I have not even the hope of better days."

The last of the five letters is dated 15, Rue d'Artois, Brussels, November 28, and is more hopeful in tone. The Princess thinks that the animosity of the first days against the dynasty no longer exists, and that the memory of eighteen years' prosperity will not be entirely wiped out. She seems to appreciate the Empress Eugénie's efforts after her flight to England, for she adds: "All has been caused by *Her*, they tell me; let us hope she will be better inspired and happier than on the 4th [of September]. She gave up a game which was still playable. But, after all——!"

Owing to her decision not to cross the Channel the Princess was not present at that notable scene in the March after Sedan, when

the unhappy man who had gained his last name of obloquy on September 2 landed in England. Among those assembled at Dover to receive the Emperor on his release from captivity at Wilhelmshöhe was Prince Napoleon—son of him whose palace Wilhelmshöhe once had been. But Jerome's daughter was not present, and, indeed, never saw in exile the cousin whose wife it had lain in her power to be.

In Brussels the Princess Mathilde stayed for the whole of the winter of 1870-1, very homesick, and willing, for all her *Napoléonatrie*, to return to France under a Republican Government. She is not known to have taken any share whatever in the curious intrigues which were being carried on at the time in Brussels to promote an Imperial restoration. Among the plotters of the Hôtel de Flandre her name does not appear. Her reward came to her in the shape of her own restoration in the following summer. Her old friend Thiers, in response to a direct application from her, once more came to her aid and brought her out of exile again. During the first storm of revolutionary insolence she had not been the least of the sufferers among her family from the vile pen of the libeller. We have heard of "Citizen Vindex," and there were others like him. Some of the newspapers did not hesitate to publish a statement that the Princess had been caught red-handed in September attempting to carry

away from the Tuilleries several cases of coined gold, the property of the Republic! But such reptiles exhausted their venom in a few months, and at last the harmless Princess came back, not indeed to her Paris home, but to her beloved Saint-Gratien.

The melancholy fourth volume of the *Journal des Goncourt*, the first of those kept by Edmond, mourning alike his brother's death and the downfall of France, has an entry on January 20, 1871, in which the writer mentions passing the Princess's house in the Rue de Courcelles, its gates open as in the days when the guests' carriages drove up in search of rational pleasure. Years later he heard from the Princess herself the story of her coming back to Paris. She got out of the train at the Gare du Nord and was obliged to walk all the way to her old home, being unable to find a carriage. When she reached the Rue de Courcelles she was tired out, and sank down upon a bench in the street, facing No. 24. She was parched with thirst, but dared not venture to show herself, and so sent her maid Julie for a glass of currant-syrup at a neighbouring wine-merchant's, whose shop she had so often passed at the height of her prosperity.

On July 1, 1871, Goncourt paid his first visit to Saint-Gratien again after the great disaster. In one of the already mentioned letters to her niece Caroline the Princess had

written : "I daily expect to hear that Saint-Gratien has been sacked. The innocent suffer for the guilty."<sup>1</sup> Saint-Gratien had indeed suffered from the German occupation,<sup>2</sup> but not so badly that its mistress could not return to it again. Doors and windows could be restored, and a powerful influence had prevented pillage of the contents. Catinat looked like a barracks, heads were at all its windows, a sentry-box was at the door, and ambulance-wagons were about the grounds. The château, however, was its old self again by July.

The Princess met Goncourt "with that animation which is peculiar to her, and which shows itself in the way in which she shakes hands." She hurried him out for a walk in the grounds and began to tell him of her sufferings in Belgium—the only narrative which we have of this period of her life :

"She told me that she was for a long time unable to account for what was going on within her in Belgium, but now she knew. She was present only in the body, her soul was far away ;

<sup>1</sup> François Coppée, writing of course without knowledge of this letter, though he may have heard her use the phrase afterwards, says of the Empire's fall: "In this catastrophe, which had so many victims, the Princess was certainly the most innocent of them all" (*Souvenirs d'un Parisien*, p. 107).

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Edward Legge, author of *The Empress Eugénie*, 1870-1910, writes : "By the fortune of war I was quartered, with the Saxon troops, at St. Gratien in 1870, and found the 'occupied' residence of Prince Louis's celebrated aunt and the beautiful grounds very pleasant in those golden autumn days of the Terrible Year."

so much so, indeed, that every morning, when she awoke, she imagined herself in her home in Paris. As I complimented her on her good spirits, she said : ‘Ah, it was not always so ; there has been a strange and terrible time when, through all that I had passed through, my jaws were so set that really it was a torture to speak.’ And then she talked much of the petty miseries of life there, such as the winter-cold, which drove her to take to her bed to keep warm and to hold conversations with her friends through the open door.”

At this moment some one came to the Princess with a message. She turned to Goncourt with a frown. “Just imagine,” she said, “there is a rumour at Saint-Gratien that the Empress is hidden here. How well people know us ! Should I conspire and come here to do it ? They are unaware that all I have asked for is the safeguarding of my person and of Saint-Gratien, ‘my individual liberty,’ as I wrote to M. Thiers.”

At the end of August Goncourt paid another visit to Saint-Gratien. He remarks on the change in the Princess since the old days—the long silences, the absence of the lively sallies and frank criticisms, which had so marked her conversation. From some sudden movement of her hand or foot or body one could guess the indignation within her soul ready to explode ; but at once she would close her eyes, as though to lull her wrath to sleep. Some of her old

friends were visitors at the house, the younger Dumas, the Benedettis, and Soulié. The last was full of the disgraceful condition of Versailles in the hands of the Republicans, a subject which can scarcely have added to the Princess's calm of mind.

Edmond de Goncourt is now the only regular chronicler whom we have of the life of the Princess, and though his *Journal* continues to give us information about her down to the year 1895, that information is at times rather scanty. This matters less because the course of her days after her return to France now became even more regular than it had been under the Empire, and anything which might be called an event was indeed rare. To the first real event Goncourt makes no allusion whatever. The death of the Emperor Napoleon III. took place on Thursday, January 9, 1873, after the third of three operations intended to give him relief from his malady. The Empress was present at the death-bed. The Prince Imperial, hurrying from Woolwich, was too late to see his father's last moments. The body was embalmed, and a summons was sent to the absent relatives to attend the funeral at Chislehurst on the 15th day of the month.

The Princess Mathilde, with a small suite, arrived in London at the end of the week, and put up at Thomas's Hotel in Berkeley Square. The Princess Caroline Murat describes her as

"very cross and very sorry for herself" at being in a country for which she had no liking. Prince Napoleon with his wife and family arrived about the same time and went to Claridge's, the Prince having no longer the house near Hyde Park, which he had taken in 1870. On Sunday, January 12, Mathilde was among the congregation at the special service at St. Mary's, Chislehurst, and on Tuesday all the members of the Imperial family now in England presented themselves at Camden Place to view the lying-in-state. After the Prince Imperial and the other princes had taken their last look at the dead, the Princesses Mathilde and Clothilde, both clad in heavy crêpe, went in together to the *chapelle-ardente*. Then followed a really wonderful demonstration. The lying-in-state had been announced to end at 7 o'clock, but no less than seventeen thousand people had come to Chislehurst to pay their respects, and it was more than two hours later before they could all be passed through the draped corridor to the room where the late Emperor lay. At last at 9.30 the coffin was closed by the undertakers, but the sealing of the outer shell and the arrangement of the pall and catafalque were not finished before midnight.

Early on the morning of the 15th the corridors and ante-rooms of Camden Place were crowded with the distinguished men present for the

funeral. All Frenchmen wishing to join the procession were admitted through the lodge-gates, and by 10 o'clock the grounds were packed. Furthermore, the crowd outside, in the main English, kept growing until the half-mile between the lodge and the chapel of St. Mary was thickly lined on both sides of the road. The hearse, drawn by eight black horses, and draped with a black velvet pall embossed with the Imperial crown and arms, set out for the chapel followed by a procession six hundred strong, all men, including the Imperial princes, every single member of the Imperial household as it had been before the Franco-Prussian War, and dozens of former Ministers, Ambassadors, Councillors of State, and Deputies, most of them wearing bunches of violets and many carrying wreaths of yellow immortelles.

For the chapel itself only one hundred and eighty tickets had been issued. The Empress herself, worn out by her long vigil beside the coffin, was not present, but remained shut up in her room with a few attendants. The first to arrive at the chapel were the ladies of her household. The Duchess of Malakoff, Mesdames de Fleury, de Saint-Arnaud, Canrobert, and Rouher, the Marquise de Lavalette, the Duchess of Mouchy, and others having been shown to their places, at half-past ten the Princesses Mathilde and Clothilde arrived and were conducted to seats within the chancel. At 11 o'clock

the altar-candles were lighted, and half an hour later Father Goddard and his attendants, with crucifix and candles, proceeded down the nave and to the churchyard-gate to meet the procession, now consisting of at least a thousand Frenchmen, together with representatives of Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales, a deputation of Italian officers sent over by King Victor Emmanuel, etc. Preceded by the Bishop of Southwark, Monseigneur Bauer, and other ecclesiastics, the coffin was borne up to the pedestal prepared for it, covered with a purple pall divided by a broad gold cloth and worked with the crown, the initial N, and the golden bees of the Empire. The Princes now took their seats; the Prince Imperial, enveloped in a black cloak, nearest the coffin, and close by him Prince Napoleon, Princes Lucien and Charles Bonaparte, and the Princes Murat. Farther off could be seen the bearers of most of the historic names of the Second Empire who still lived to testify to the loyalty of their hearts.

The Mass began. "There is a thin mist of rising incense," says a contemporary account. "The Prince Imperial stands pale and motionless near the coffin, Prince Napoleon's massive head is seen above and beyond, and still farther on the Princesses Mathilde and Clothilde. Many ladies hold handkerchiefs to their faces, and there are tears in the men's eyes, whether they allow them or not. The coffin is loaded with

wreaths exquisitely made of violets and white roses, and with great yellow rings of immortelles. . . . The Absolution is pronounced, and then the wreaths are taken off the coffin, and the great Imperial crown worked in gold disappears as the pall is turned over the lid. Slowly the music plays, as they carry the coffin through an archway in the chapel-wall, and place it on a low pedestal in a temporary structure built over a vault into which it will be lowered. The beautiful flowers are again heaped on the lid, and the grated gate is closed. The Prince Imperial and the other princes kneel before it in succession, sprinkling the holy water and signing the cross. Then they leave the church in order, the Prince Imperial and Prince Napoleon returning in a carriage, the others on foot. The organ plays the *De Profundis* as the mourners leave the chapel, most of them first passing before the grating, taking the holy-water brush from the acolyte, and, as they make the pious gesture, looking into the gloomy recess in which the coffin of the Emperor, once so great and feared, so busy and unfathomable, is hidden by flowers.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, January 16, 1873. The writer of the article comments on the fact that within the short space of twenty-two years two churches, or rather two small wayside chapels, on English soil had had greatness thrust upon them and become the shrines of dissenting political faiths. A King of France (Louis-Philippe) lay for many years at St. Mary’s, Weybridge, and now an Emperor of the French lay at St. Mary’s, Chislehurst.

The remarkable demonstration which followed the return of the Imperial party to Camden Place must have been seen, or at least, heard by the Princess Mathilde. The Prince Imperial, coming out to thank the crowd still waiting in the grounds for their attendance at the funeral, was greeted with a cry of "*Vive Napoléon IV.!*" which was immediately echoed on every side, causing him to hasten indoors again in a state of great emotion.

January 15 remained for some years a notable date in the Bonapartist calendar. On the first anniversary of the Emperor's death numerous Paris churches held special services. The Princess Mathilde was seen at the church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, in the company of Prince Napoleon—*parcus deorum cultor et infrequens*—and his wife Clothilde.

Two months later, on March 16, 1874, occurred a ceremony at which the presence of the same three persons might have been expected, did we not know that of them one never, and another seldom, were on good terms with the mistress of the exiled Court of Chislehurst. The Prince Imperial came of age, being now eighteen. In honour of the occasion six hundred loyalists came over to England to pay their respects to "Napoleon IV."—among them being Count Nieuwerkerke—and many more gathered together from London and other parts of the country. The Imperial family was well

represented by princes and princesses living in England ; but the branch of Jerome Bonaparte had no representative present. Prince Napoleon, or rather a friend acting on his behalf, issued through the Press an explanation of his absence, in which he dissociated himself from " those whose counsels are followed at Chislehurst," and affirmed that " the happiness of France is of higher importance than the personal claims of any dynasty."

Prince Napoleon had left Camden Place on the day of the Emperor's funeral, declining to have anything to do with the Prince Imperial's education. What had happened was that, on his arrival, he had been conducted into the presence of the Empress, who, after a little conversation about the last moments of his cousin, invited him to proceed forthwith to an inventory of his papers. The Prince consented and went to the study. Here he found that everything was sealed with the seal of Piétri, the Empress's secretary. Piétri accompanied him into the room, broke all the seals for him, and made a great show of putting everything at his disposal. But, as a matter of fact, there was nothing to be seen that was of the slightest value. Papers which the Prince had expected to find were not there, and especially the copy of a treaty between France and Austria for common action in the event of a war with Prussia, which he had felt certain would be in

one particular drawer. The Prince turned aside, saying it was useless to go any farther, as there was nothing for him to do, and, having attended the funeral, immediately set off back to Paris, after making his declaration with regard to the Prince Imperial. There was no real peace again among the Bonapartists till Prince Napoleon died.

## CHAPTER XX

### CHANGED, YET THE SAME

THE Princess Mathilde lost more than her rank of Imperial Highness by the revolution. She lost also her two grants from the Civil List and was reduced once more to the condition in which she had been before Louis-Napoleon became Emperor of the French, that is to say, to dependence upon the Demidoff money. This did not make her a poor woman, except in comparison with what had been hers since the end of 1861. From seven hundred thousand francs her income dropped back to two hundred thousand. François Coppée writes of the effect which this had upon her :

“ Though her resources were much diminished, she made not the least economy in her charitable expenditure, and continued, notably, to provide for the costly upkeep of the hospital for crippled children which she had founded. The style of her home-life was less magnificent, but remained still very elegant and in exquisite taste.”

We can almost imagine that by mistake we have picked up a wrong volume of the *Journal*

when we turn to Edmond de Goncourt's entry on February 7, 1872, and read of an evening party at the Princess's, with Théophile Gautier vigorously defending Victor Hugo against all the world—"the great Hugo, poet of the mists and clouds and sea, the poet of all things fluid." However, we are not at the Rue de Courcelles; the Princess now established in her last Paris home, in the Rue de Berri. Here she set up again the *salon* which she had founded in the Rue de Courcelles and carried it on as long as she lived. It is astonishing what little difference was caused by the Empire's fall to this institution, as it has been called, of the Princess Mathilde's. "The noble and charming woman," says Coppée, "received now the reward for her life of kindness; for with very rare exceptions, all her guests of the old days hastened again to her. . . . A few *arrivists*, as we call them now, no doubt deserted her and turned to the great ones of the new régime. But the number was very small, and those did not belong to the intellectual aristocracy, for baseness of heart ever goes with mediocrity of brain." Another writer, Ernest Pinard, says of the Rue de Berri that, "though death had made many gaps and black hair had turned white, still the tact and wit of a superior woman attracted all the faithful; not only the faithful to the Empire, but the faithful to art, letters, and science."

This was written considerably later ; for, of course, "the faithful to the Empire" in Paris in the early seventies were few. Such Imperialism as still dwelt there went with bated breath and on tiptoe at the beginning, and discussion of political subjects was dangerous. One feeling, however, united Imperialists and anti-Imperialists, shame at the disgrace of France. The Princess felt this as keenly as any one. It is an interesting picture that is drawn of her in the *Journal des Goncourt* on the last night of Marshal Bazaine's trial for the surrender of Metz. The dinner-party that evening had been cold and constrained, all oppressed by thoughts of what was happening at the trial. The Princess, as soon as the meal was finished, betook herself to her needlework. She scarcely paid attention to what was going on around her or had a word for any one whom politeness brought to her side. As fresh guests came in, she would lift her head and ask, "Well, is anything known yet?" As the evening wore on and no one brought any news, she grew impatient and suddenly exclaimed : "You men are simply astounding. No one knows anything ! Why, if I wore trousers, I am sure I should go everywhere and find out everything. Come, young Gautier, if you were to go to the Cercle Impériale, perhaps you might hear something." The young Gautier, Théophile's son, went off, was long absent, and

at last came back with the sentence, "Condemned to death unanimously." And here, characteristically, Goncourt's story ends. He has got his effect, and we who should like to hear the Princess's comment, even at the cost of an anti-climax, are left unsatisfied.

Two more pictures belonging to the early days of the Third Republic are full of interest. The scene of both is Saint-Gratien. One evening, towards the end of October 1874, Goncourt dropped in unexpectedly to dinner. He found the Princess lying on the large divan in the studio, on which, as we have heard, it was her custom to give herself up to reflection when twilight came on. When he entered, she sprang up from the divan and, taking him into the neighbouring room, made him walk up and down it at her side. Her step was quick and almost military, and she discoursed to him about life's deceptions. "It almost makes you want to laugh," she said, "when they only come singly; but when there are many, one after another, it causes you to reflect sorrowfully."

A week later, the Princess having reproached him with not coming to stay at her house as he did at other people's, Goncourt went down to Saint-Gratien again for a few days, bringing with him a copy of Daudet's *Fromont jeune et Risler ainé*. In the evening some one read this aloud, while the rest of the company sat round

and listened. In the middle of the reading Claudio Popelin took some pieces of paper, which he had damped, and began to drop upon them spots of water-colour paint to produce the effect of marbling. The Princess, sitting with half-closed eyes, looked at him for a moment, and then suddenly, with a cat-like pounce, seized the paint-box from him. Tearing a sheet from a sketching-block, she commenced to decorate it in imitation of Popelin. She covered sheet after sheet with extraordinary and startling patterns. Soon green and carmine patches spattered themselves over her white cashmere dress. Goncourt told her of the method of veining wood, whereon she tore a comb from her hair and set to work to streak her designs with it. She does not notice the lateness of the hour, so wideawake is she and so interested, with the feverish interest of a child.

Claudius Popelin, who started the idea that pleased the Princess so much this evening, only appears as a character in her story after the catastrophe of 1870, and the beginning of their friendship is obscure. A few years her junior, he had made a name for himself not only as painter and enameller, but also as a graceful poet and as translator of Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia*. With his artistic and literary contemporaries he was a favourite. The Princess Mathilde made no concealment of her liking for him, and uncharitable gossip

assigned to him the same place in her household which Count Nieuwerkerke had held under the Empire. She was even credited with having taken him as her second husband. In 1879 the new edition of the *Almanach de Gotha* gave currency to the story, inspired by whom we cannot say. The Princess promptly wrote to contradict it, in a letter appearing in the *Figaro* of January 5, 1879. Her enemies—for she still had some, if only because she was a Bonaparte—doubtless consoled themselves with the sneer that if she had not married Popelin she ought to have done so. Her more than fifty years could not protect her against such attacks as this, nor the fact that Popelin was not, as might be supposed from some accounts, a beguiled young man, but a widower with a grown-up son—Gustave, also an artist—who was an occasional visitor at her house. It is not worth while, however, to waste space in combating the insinuations of a few malicious tongues. The Princess's frank and affectionate nature laid her very open to being misunderstood by those who did not resemble her, whether the misunderstanding was genuine or wilful. As with many others of her friends, including old Giraud, she liked to assert her proprietorship over Popelin. For discretion, in this respect, she had no care.

The household of the Princess was much changed in these days from what it had been

under the Empire, but there was still a staff of some dimensions. Only Eugène Giraud remained as a memorial of the old days. Another painter, Philippe Rousseau, took the place of Hébert. The ladies included Madame Guyon, described by Goncourt as “the actress with the moustache, an excellent woman who looked like a cross-grained nurse”; the Baronne de Galbois, and Mlles. Abbatucci and Zeller. As an Imperial Highness, the Princess had had a *chevalier d'honneur*, General Bougenel, on whose death she said, by way of a funeral encomium: “The General had every good quality, was always at his post, and kept his place marvellously. In all the years that he followed me as my *chevalier d'honneur* the excellent man never once trod upon my train!” In his stead now there was General Chaucard, who seems also to have kept his place marvellously, for we hear little of him but his name. We must take from Goncourt one more picture of the interior of Saint-Gratien in 1874. *Déjeuner* is over, the conversation has flagged, and the newspapers have all been skimmed. It is 2 o'clock and the Princess has settled down in her studio to a portrait which she is painting of the writer. “Gradually silence prevails in the studio. Nothing can be heard but General Chaucard's indiarubber as he rubs something out, Popelin's pencil, the cuckoo-clock, the snoring dogs, and stifled sounds from

the younger women, giggling like girls in a corner of the classroom. The Princess works in busy absorption. From time to time old Giraud's diabolic face appears over her shoulder or behind her arm with 'The nose must be finer' or 'That collar is too thin.' Then he vanishes and returns to his painting of fancy costumes for Sardou's *La Haine*. The Princess works on. Daylight fails, and still she continues. At last the sitting is over. At once, without a moment's rest, she turns to her embroidery, and as she takes up her needle says: 'Bring me that piece of white satin, I want to embroider something on it.' The satin and the silks being brought, Popelin must make an instant hunt in the cupboards for his designs of flowers, among which the Princess selects a tulip. Marvellous is the activity of this woman!"

This activity struck all who came into contact with her, and it remained a leading characteristic to the end. Only a fortnight before her death, though she was incapacitated from getting about, and indeed had been in that condition for many weeks before, she complained pathetically to the Countess Tornielli, wife of the Italian Ambassador in Paris: "I have many things to finish!"

In the obituary notice of her which he contributed to the *Figaro* the younger Gautier says: "She had a horror of idleness, of body

as well as of mind. She was always busy. In the morning, wearing a coquettish silk apron, she went through the rooms after the servants (well-trained and careful as they were), dusting the ornaments on the shelves and putting every piece of furniture in its right place. In the afternoon, when she had given her audiences, there came the painting lesson," or the music-lesson, or the history lesson, according to the day. And at night, except when there was a party, she sat working with her needle in the midst of her ladies.

"She superintended every little detail in her house," says Ernest Lavisce, writing at the same time, "and kept everything in order. . . . Her hours were regularly mapped out; hours for painting, hours for music, hours for paying or receiving visits, hours for charitable works. In the evening, especially at Saint-Gratien, she presided over a workroom full of embroiderers. One never saw her idle."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE NEW PARIS HOME

THE house in the Rue de Berri in which the Princess Mathilde was to pass the greater portion of each year in the last three decades of her life had once been occupied, or stood on the site of a house occupied, by the celebrated Madame de Genlis. It was not as sumptuous as that in the Rue de Courcelles where the Princess had reigned as Imperial Highness. But if not imposing from outside—all that could be seen from the street being the out-buildings and domestic offices—it was what the house-agents call a large and commodious residence, of sufficient size to hold the treasures which had fortunately escaped the hands of the Prussians and the revolutionaries alike, and to welcome the guests of the Princess. On her death in 1904 M. Frédéric Masson wrote a preface to the catalogue prepared for the sale of her belongings (apart from the family relics), and from this<sup>1</sup> we take the liberty of abstract-

<sup>1</sup> Republished in the volume entitled *Jadis*.

ing some details about the house and its arrangement.

Between the street and the building proper was a gravelled courtyard. Past the portal a new arrival came into a hall draped with the red hangings which the Princess so much loved. On the left was the main staircase, on the right and in front were doors painted with brilliant flower-designs. At the sides of the main door on the right stood busts of Napoleon and Eugénie. Entering, one was in a great gallery formed by the first and second reception-saloons, between which the partition had been removed. In the first were an upright piano, stands bearing Chinese vases, sofas, and one of the four-seated centre ottomans which were popular in those days. Busts of Jerome, Hortense, and Josephine were along the walls; on the white marble mantelpiece one of Madame Mère, and near it Carpeaux's bust of the Princess herself. A large round table stood on the threshold of the second saloon, covered with a red silk cloth, on which lay the illustrated papers, the reviews, copies of new books, the many little trinkets with which their owner was wont to play, her work-basket, spectacles, scent-bottles, and *bonbonnières*. Near this every night after dinner she would sit on her own particular sofa, with a half-circle of her most intimate friends on her left hand, the other guests distributed among the chairs, arm-

chairs, and couches about the room. Little other furniture was here, except some great Chinese vases in the corners. The walls were hung with red silk, but this was largely hidden by the number of portraits, landscapes, etc., in dull gold frames.

In the third saloon, entered both from the second and from the hall, the chief picture was a portrait of a lady, English School, which the Princess left in her will to the Louvre; and a toilet-set which had once belonged to Patiomkin was displayed on a large gilt pier-table. This room was not used except on special occasions. Like the second saloon it opened into the immense square conservatory—which was a conservatory inasmuch as it was built of iron, was roofed with glass, and had in the middle four palms springing from great copper tubs of Eastern workmanship. Otherwise it was another saloon. It had no windows but the doors leading into the garden. Its walls were hung with red like the other rooms, and on them were pictures of the modern school, one of them so big as to occupy a whole wall. Among these pictures were portraits of Prince Napoleon, of the Princess herself (by Hébert and Doucet), and of young members of the family. In the very centre of the conservatory, amid the palms, there rose a tall grey marble column surmounted by a bronze bust of Napoleon I., which dominated all around.

Along the walls were tables carrying vases from Sèvres or Japan, fixed candelabra, couches, writing-tables, a grand piano. A multitude of sofas, divans, and armchairs, all covered in red silk, stood about the room; the chief feature in the arrangement of which was that the furniture cut it up, as it were, into six separate but communicating pieces, making it suitable alike for private conversations and for listening to music or speech.

On one side of the conservatory was the dining-room. At the farther end of this could be seen Rochet's statue of Napoleon at Brienne, flanked by Guillaume's busts of King Jerome and Prince Napoleon. A few Sèvres vases on stands, a fine Italian marriage-chest, and a curious Dutch clock were the only other decorations of the room, but the walls were hung with some most magnificent tapestries made originally for Pope Leo X. and bordered with the insignia of various members of the Medici family, including that Pope himself.

The staircase leading up to the first-floor apartments was adorned with pictures from top to bottom, one of the largest of which was Gros's equestrian portrait of Queen Catherine of Westphalia, now at Versailles. On this floor there was a room corresponding to the hall below, in which were hung most of the Princess's own larger water-colours, while in glass cases were collections of snuff-boxes, enamels,

and trinkets of all kinds. In the gallery corresponding to that on the ground floor the chief feature was the assembly of family portraits and relics, particularly such as were connected with the great Emperor. It was here that the Princess preferred to receive her most intimate friends, and the furniture of the room was peculiarly her own, especially the sofa with the many coloured cushions, which was her habitual seat. Adjoining this room was the studio, in which it became her custom in the Rue de Berri to shut herself up regularly twice a week for the whole day.

Speaking of the charming effect of combined elegance and artistic taste produced by the Princess's home M. Masson says that to appreciate it to the full it was necessary to have seen the mistress herself, towards the middle of one of her evenings, leave the first reception-saloon, where she had been welcoming fresh arrivals, and make her entry into the conservatory. "Every one rose at her approach," he says, "and she passed with a gentle, almost imperceptible movement through the midst of the groups, speaking a word to each guest, and bestowing on each the grace of her smile. . . . Wherever she might have been she would have taken the lead over all the women, and have received the respectful admiration of all the men; she would have assumed one place without dispute—the first."

Interesting, too, is M. Masson's description of her dress and jewellery : " Full dress became her beauty ; the long, ample robes, of bright silk, from which, after the fashion of the Second Empire, her shoulders flashed ; the light scarves she wore, the wonderful fans in those divine hands of hers, and, above all, her jewels. Not that she overloaded herself with precious stones ; but on every occasion she had some ornament which no ordinary person could possess and every queen would envy. Her jewel-case seemed inexhaustible ; and whether she took out her seven-rowed collar of pearls, her black-pearl necklace, the three-rowed pearl necklace given by the Emperor Napoleon to the Queen of Westphalia on her marriage, the stream of enormous diamonds, the diamond necklace with the rare setting, the Imperial diadem which suited her head so well, or the diamond eagle which she wore on her bodice, the jewels were always of inestimable value, and of a beauty that defied all rivalry." It is recorded that after the sale by the Republic of the Crown jewels certain ladies who had made purchases came to the Rue de Berri one evening wearing ornaments that had belonged to the Imperial family. This was bad taste ; but the Princess only showed her appreciation of it by putting on her black pearls and nothing more.

It did not require the splendour of her jewellery, says M. Masson, to proclaim her the

Imperial Princess. Only let some one unwisely say a word against her divinities, Napoleon and France. "Then there was no need of grand attire, of diadems, and pearls on Cæsar's niece, and perhaps she would have seemed more majestic still in her simple dress of blue foulard with white spots, her black apron, and the light suède gloves she wore on her hands."

It would be a hopeless task to attempt to collect the scattered references in the writings of the later "*Mathildiens*," to the life of the Rue de Berri, and the famous people who made their appearance there. Among Frenchmen who were followers of the arts scarcely any one seems to have made his *début* in the world until he had been received by the Princess. In no respect is the absence of her memoirs more to be regretted than because they must have given us so many pictures of a profoundly interesting circle at this period. Among the Princess's later literary friends was the unhappy Guy de Maupassant; but we hear of little to connect their names among the reminiscences of the day. Goncourt does not speak of him in relation to the *salon* of the Rue de Berri until the year before his death, when the sad symptoms of his mania are discussed there. His physician, Dr. Blanche, was an occasional visitor at the house, and at the beginning of 1893 spoke of the worse signs which heralded the end. The Italian author Baron Lumbroso,

however, publishes a brief but interesting note sent to himself by the Princess in 1901, when he was engaged on a book about the dead novelist. "I knew M. Guy de Maupassant well," she wrote. "I saw him often at Saint-Gratien. I was very fond of him, and his loss to me was very great. I regret him deeply—he was unpretending and staunch."

An interesting figure at the Princess's house was the blind painter Anastasi, by whose miserable condition the Princess was profoundly touched. He had but one pleasure left in life, that of conversation. "And even here," he once told Goncourt, "I miss the human charm of this most precious thing—the smiles of those with whom I am talking. In that night in which I dwell, conversation with the living is in some ways like intercourse with disembodied spirits." The Princess made him a frequent guest, and, if her smile was denied to him, at least she could provide him in abundance with his one remaining joy.

Speaking of the musicians to be met at her house the Paris correspondent of the *Times* wrote in his obituary notice of her: "Princess Mathilde among her many accomplishments did not number that of being a good musician. She used to say that she had had without success twelve masters of the piano. This, however, did not prevent her from extending her artistic protection to Gounod, Ambroise Thomas, Mas-

senet, and Verdi, and until quite lately she several times a year gave musical ‘at homes,’ at which the most distinguished artists were to be heard.”

Among the names which suggest an aristocracy that is not one of the arts we see those of Rohan, Gramont, Ségur, Cadore, La Tremoille, Trévise, and the like. And it is to be noted that after 1870 the Princess Mathilde renewed her acquaintance with the sons of Louis-Philippe, when they, too, came back to France. The Duke of Aumale was her favourite. It is said that later it used to amuse her greatly to hear the members of her innermost circle of friends make sly allusion to the “flirtation” of the two septuagenarians—herself and the Duke.

The Princess’s foreign visitors did not include many Britons, at which we need not be surprised in view of what we have already heard concerning her strong prejudice.<sup>1</sup> “The English poet Wilde” seems to have gone to the Rue de

<sup>1</sup> It will be remembered that the Duke of Hamilton was often her guest in her earlier days. Another figure to be met with in the first house in the Rue de Courcelles was the Marquis of Hertford, in whose character Viel-Castel, as might be imagined, took great interest (see, for instance, his description of the Marquis and the little Spanish dancer on May 25, 1851). But it does not take the fingers of two hands to count the Britons whose presence in the Princess’s *salons* is recorded. She extended her prejudice to Americans also. In his amusing work *Iconoclasts* Mr. James Huneker says: “She set her face against the free and easy democratic manners, and because of this disliked the American invasion—few of our countrymen crossed her doors.”

Berri, talking astonishingly of his impressions of America, from which he had not long returned. One day Goncourt arrived at the Princess's at the same time as an old gentleman dressed in English style, his hair in the English fashion, speaking French with an English accent; but he turned out to be Minghetti, the Italian Minister of Finance, the prevailing rage in Italian society at the time being Anglo-mania.

In the spring of 1888 the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII., was on a visit to Paris. A comment of the Princess's on him, after meeting him at dinner, is interesting. "He is open, he talks, he says what he has in his heart," she said. "He is not like other princes, who have always the air of having something to conceal." He does not appear to have been among the callers at the Rue de Berri.

A reigning monarch who visited the Princess was Oscar II., King of Sweden, who, being in Paris in 1900, came to tell her that he could not leave without presenting his respects. "I accept them," replied the Princess, "as a reparation." For it was the grandson of Bernadotte, traitor to Napoleon, who stood before her.

The Princess kept up to the end her custom of entertaining either on Christmas Day or New Year's Eve a gathering of friends for whom she made great preparations. She hunted the

shops for beautiful furniture, china, bronzes, rugs, etc., and, displaying them to her guests at the chosen moment, told them that all they saw was theirs, let them take what pleased them most. "And then and there," says Arsène Houssaye, "she loaded them with all that she had bought for them. It was a day of festival for all, but especially for herself. . . . The Princess Mathilde would have made the best of Empresses, with her noble manners and her noble heart. She was always giving, but as a great lady, seeming to be giving nothing."

"The Princess Mathilde was generous," writes another friend, Ernest Lavisse. "The completest justice that could be done to her would be the publication of her account-book for one year, taken at haphazard; and she had that certain mark of generosity, discretion. No one whom she put under an obligation, man or woman, has ever been made to feel the burden of that obligation."<sup>1</sup>

Her public charities were given with an equal grace and absence of effort as her presents to her friends, and if we hear less of them it is because she was unostentatious in her alms.

<sup>1</sup> There is no better example of the Princess's "discretion" than in the case of Théophile Gautier. Napoleon III. forgot to grant Gautier a pension. But the Princess said to him, "Your pension is entered in the ledger of the Imperial Debt—but it must be paid to you through me." It is said that Gautier never knew until just before his death that the money really came out of the Princess's private purse.

She did not talk about them; or if we find her speaking of her crippled girls' home, the Asile Mathilde, it is only because a falling off in its revenues—her own contribution to its upkeep never failed—had caused her distress. And it was only by chance that a visitor, going over to Saint-Gratien, might find her in her park entertaining a school of poor little girls from Saint-Denis. *La bonne Princesse* did not win her name by advertising her charity.

## CHAPTER XXII

### TWO LOSSES

ONCE more we reach a period in which the only events which call for chronicling are deaths. In the years 1879 and 1881 the Princess Mathilde was affected by two severe shocks, losing a favourite relative, and a very old friend. The relative was the Prince Imperial. The young Prince's death took place in Zululand on June 1, 1879; but the news was not publicly known in Paris until the 20th of the month. Edmond de Goncourt tells how on that day, the anniversary of his brother's death, he was returning from a visit to the cemetery, and walking, oblivious of what was going on about him, through the crowds of people all reading newspapers. Suddenly Camille Doucet met him, holding out a paper, which he handed to him with a mournful gesture. Goncourt read the headline: "Death of the Prince Imperial." "A fatality pursues this family of Napoleon," he comments, "a fatality like that of old which clung to the family of Atreus."

A demonstration was made by the Imperialists

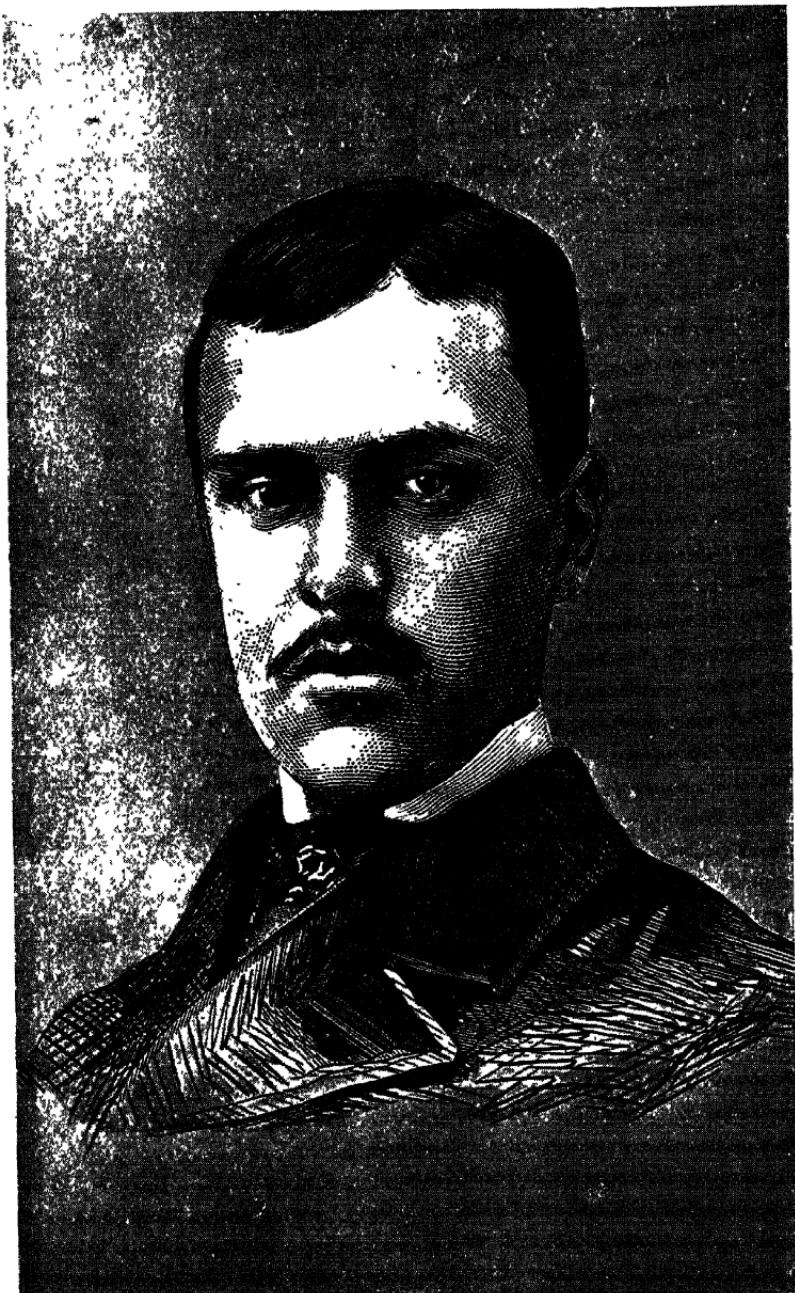
on the occasion of the burial of the young Prince's remains as remarkable as that at the funeral of Napoleon III.; and the official attitude taken up in this country rendered the scene at Chislehurst even more remarkable. Queen Victoria arrived from Windsor on the morning of Saturday, July 12, the day appointed for the funeral, accompanied by the Princess Beatrice, and, driving to Camden Place, was received by the Duke of Bassano. He led her at once to the *chapelle-ardente*, which had been fitted up in the picture-gallery of the house, its walls draped with black. Here for some time the Queen knelt, and before she left she laid upon the coffin a wreath of laurels in gold. Then she was conducted to the room where Prince Napoleon, his two sons, the Princess Mathilde, the Duchess of Mouchy, and other members of the family were awaiting her. The relatives had all paid their visit to the chapel earlier, first Napoleon and his sons, then the Princess Mathilde, and each had kissed the coffin and laid a wreath upon it. Including those which had been sent to Chislehurst by the various sovereigns of Europe, the wreaths in the chapel numbered no less than five hundred.

The descendants of Jerome Bonaparte had left Paris on July 10, the same day that the *Orontes* reached England bringing the Prince Imperial's body from the Cape. They had not

been present at the preliminary ceremonies when the coffin was landed at Woolwich, taken to the Arsenal for formal identification, and thence conveyed in state on a gun-carriage to Chislehurst; but owing to the complete prostration of the Empress Eugénie the chief duties on the actual day of the funeral fell to Prince Napoleon and his sister. Napoleon, it may be noted, neither spoke to nor saw the Empress during the whole of this visit to England.

The Prince Imperial was given an Artillery funeral, having been attached as officer to an Artillery corps after leaving the Royal Military Academy. All the troops present were drawn from the Woolwich garrison, in honour of his connection with it. The Prince of Wales, the Duke of Edinburgh, and other British Princes, who arrived at Chislehurst in a train following Queen Victoria's, all wore Artillery uniforms. The military aspect of most of the foreign representatives was striking. In sharp contrast, all the Frenchmen present were in civilian attire, that is to say, in evening dress.

The coffin was taken from Camden Place to St. Mary's on a gun-carriage drawn by three pairs of brown horses, each pair of which had a mounted Artilleryman riding on the right and the left of it. As it started from the grounds the bands struck up the Dead March in *Saul*. Queen Victoria watched the departure and then went into the house to see the bereaved



PRINCE VICTOR NAPOLEON IN YOUTH.

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mother, who, as she had done six years before, remained shut up in her room and did not go to the church. The procession was composed entirely of men, the ladies to whom places had been allotted having already proceeded to St. Mary's. The pall-bearers were the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of Edinburgh, Connaught, and Cambridge, the Crown Prince of Sweden and Norway, the Duke of Bassano, and M. Rouher, and the chief mourners Prince Napoleon and his two sons, the Princes Lucien and Napoleon-Charles Bonaparte, and Joachim and Louis Murat. The number of people in the procession was not perhaps so great as at the burial of Napoleon III., but it was estimated that between thirty-five and forty thousand in all were at Chislehurst that day, including the crowd gathered on the common to watch the coffin pass.

Slowly the procession made its way towards the church, to the music of the military bands. At 12 o'clock St. Mary's was reached. "The priests came out to meet the dead. The Bishop of Southwark, in full pontificals, was preceded by Monsignor Goddard, in violet robes, and the rest of the clergy. The officers placed the coffin on their shoulders. The Bishop sprinkled the coffin with holy water and recited *De profundis*, and then, preceded by the cross-bearer, who had come from Camden, and by the whole of the clergy, he led the way for the bearers into

the church. The officers placed the body on the catafalque before the sanctuary. The mourners passed in. The High Mass proceeded. When the eyes grew accustomed to the gloom of the darkened little church, hung throughout with sable cloth, on which the Imperial N. in gold glistened, while the cross and figures of the Virgin stood out in bold relief, it became possible to see how illustriously it was tenanted. The English Princes who had borne the pall sat to the right and left of the coffin ; the Imperial Princes on the left. The Princess of Wales was in the gloom on the right, Princess Mathilde sat beside her brother and nephews on the left. The only daylight came through the Napoleon Chapel, just behind them, and lit up the studious face of the young Prince Victor. Behind stood a few gentlemen within the Napoleon Chapel itself. . . . The triple peal of the bell above the church told the great crowd of mourners, who were perforce excluded from the little building and stood in the churchyard, of the elevation of the Host and chalice, and the worshippers within heard with sudden shock the cadets fire their three volleys to the memory of their comrade.”<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon IV. was buried in the soil of that country for which he had given his life ; the second of the dynasty to whom England had been fatal, as some of the loyalists bitterly

<sup>1</sup> *Times*, July 14, 1879.

observed. Among these Anglophobes, as we know, must be classed the Princess Mathilde. She left England now, still less in love with it than before, and never crossed the Channel again. She had shaken its dust off her feet. Her attitude is intelligible, and it can be but a source of regret that so true and amiable a woman should have had cause for disliking this country.

In the September following the second funeral at Chislehurst, Edmond de Goncourt visited the Princess at Saint-Gratien, and the *Journal* contains an anecdote of the Prince Imperial which he must have got from her mouth. The Emperor once had made for him a series of small figure-models representing all the regiments of the French army. The infant Prince was allowed to look at these, but not to touch them. They were kept locked up in a cupboard. One day, however, the key was left in the cupboard-door, and the child got all the figures out and, setting them on the floor, began to play with them. Suddenly the door of the room opened, and a big man entered, stumbled, and fell upon the army, smashing many of the figures. They were patched up as much as possible and put away in the cupboard, and the Emperor was not told of their condition until next day. When he heard he sent for "Loulou," who said that he had broken the soldiers. He must have broken them on purpose, said

Napoleon, as there were so many damaged. How had it happened? The Prince Imperial could not be induced to say, not even by the infliction of a "military" punishment, the most severe form of which, to him, was the forbidding the *Cent Gardes* to present arms to him when he passed. The Emperor told his cousin Mathilde about it, and expressed astonishment at such obstinacy. Mathilde extracted from the child privately that it was General Lebœuf—the man whose blind confidence in his army was one day to prove so fatal to France—who had caused the accident. But he only told her on condition that she did not betray him to his father.

Of the Princess's fondness for her young cousin there can be no doubt. We have heard of her anxiety about him in 1870. In the height of her indignation against Sainte-Beuve two years before, one of her grievances had been that he had said that he should never serve the Prince Imperial—though we may well imagine that this was an unjust interpretation of one of Sainte-Beuve's remarks. Many stories are told of her indulgence towards the boy and her interventions on his behalf. And one of her first acts on returning to Paris after her Belgian exile was to buy at a sale of the former Imperial stable his favourite riding-pony "Tambour," which she sent over to him at Camden Place.

The reconciliation which had taken place

between the Princess and the Empress Eugénie over the body of the Prince Imperial was not again disturbed, though their residence on opposite sides of the Channel did not lead to their meeting again except at rare intervals. In her first hurried journey through Paris since the revolution, on her way back from the pilgrimage to the scene of her son's death in Zululand, the Empress does not seem to have met the Princess. But in May 1882 Eugénie was coming back to England from Nice, and broke the journey in Paris, staying for a while at the house of the Duke of Mouchy. Among the visitors to her there was the Princess Mathilde. Again, eight months later, they met in Paris, when the Empress's visit created a great sensation. But we are anticipating the course of events, and must retrace our steps.

At the end of 1881 another death occurred which meant much to the Princess Mathilde, that of Eugène Giraud, the last of the early inmates of the Rue de Courcelles. The Princess was profoundly affected by the loss of her "old Giraille," after an intimacy of no less than thirty-five years. She was seen at the cemetery on New Year's Day, a striking picture of grief, as she stood by his grave in her long black cloak. Three days later, calling upon an artist acquaintance, she suddenly burst into sobs, and declared that she did not know what to do with her days now, that she must find something to distract

her thoughts from her sorrows, that she wished her friends would adopt her for a while. She ultimately published a little volume of reminiscences of "her familiar and faithful friend," for private circulation.

M. Frédéric Masson, while admitting Giraud's cleverness and versatility, is of opinion that his influence over the Princess's art and her appreciation of art was not for her good ; that he checked her advance towards the better things to which her native æsthetic instinct would have led her. She remained "Her Imperial Highness the Princess Mathilde, pupil of M. Eugène Giraud," as she described herself when exhibiting her works ; while as a critic of painting she was not as sound in taste as her own brother. Here we find some justification for Viel-Castel's complaints of the Giraud ascendancy ; but it is, of course, a difficult matter to decide whether a pupil, if he or she did not come under the one particular influence that proved decisive for the future, would necessarily have made better progress. Some inferior influence might have prevailed. No doubt her personal liking for Giraud, which his amusing conversation and lively humour contributed so much to strengthen, led her to over-estimate his artistic merit ; but she was of that nature which made the personal equation unduly powerful in her reckonings. As a buyer of pictures by modern artists she showed this, for she purchased quantities out of

regard for their painters, visitors to her house, not because her own taste told her to buy.

The gap left in the Princess Mathilde's life by the vanishing of Giraud, the friend, was never filled. As her art-master-in-chief he had several successors, first Ferrier, then Doucet, and lastly Marcel Baschet; and the fact that there were several proves how much she missed Giraud.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### AN UNFOUNDED SCARE

ON January 17, 1883, Edmond de Goncourt writes in his *Journal*:

"This morning's papers tell me of Prince Napoleon's arrest and the discussion in the Chamber on the Floquet proposal. I do not care about Prince Napoleon, but there is the poor Princess with her long love of Paris. This worries me all the day."

What had the Prince done that could threaten his sister's continued residence in the beloved city? He had taken a step which frightened some timid politicians to such an extent that for the moment every Bonaparte—as well as every Bourbon—was too dangerous, in their eyes, to be allowed to live in France.

Prince Napoleon, after the overthrow of the Empire, had come over to England and taken a house facing Hyde Park, on the Bayswater side. As the Princess Clothilde, however, did not share his liking for London, he soon gave up this house and went to his villa of Prangins. Before the end of 1872 he re-entered France

without permission, accompanied by his wife, and was promptly deported to the frontier. After the Emperor's death his plea to be allowed to live in France was listened to, and he established himself once more in Paris, like his sister—and, like her, in a new house, for the "Pompeian palace," which had been his under the Empire, was now in other hands. In Paris both brother and sister became rallying-points for the Bonapartists; but, whereas at the Princess's they did not conspire, the Prince became the leader of one wing of the Imperialist party, the Liberal, or, rather, Republican wing, which rejected the leadership of the Empress Eugénie. The death of Napoleon III. had only rendered the relations between the Empress and her husband's cousin worse than they had been before, as we have heard, and the Prince had left Camden Place declaring that he must now decline to be responsible in any way for the Prince Imperial's upbringing.

The feud was lamentable from the point of view of the Imperialist party, but the situation was destined to become still worse. The Empress's dominion over her son enabled her to deal the Prince a mortal blow. No doubt she was supported in her policy by the official section of the Bonapartists, especially by Rouher. It is impossible, however, not to see the personal motive as well in the regulation of the succession.

On the death of the Prince Imperial the natural heir to the hopes of a throne was Prince Napoleon, the reversion being to the male line of Jerome Bonaparte—though it must be added that the family of Lucien Bonaparte steadfastly protested against their degradation in rank below the family of a younger brother. But on the opening of the will of “Napoleon IV.,” made by him on the eve of his setting out for Zululand, the Imperialist party found that they were asked to transfer their allegiance. The codicil read as follows :

“I do not need to request my mother to neglect nothing in defence of the memory of my grand-uncle and my father. I beg her to remember that as long as there are Bonapartes the Imperial cause will have representatives. The duties of our House towards the country do not cease with my death; when I am dead the task of continuing the work of Napoleon I. and Napoleon III. falls to the elder son of Prince Napoleon, and I hope that my beloved mother, by seconding him with all her power, will give to us, who are no longer, this last supreme proof of affection.”

Prince Napoleon, as we have heard, left Chislehurst in 1879 without seeing the Empress Eugénie. His nephew’s disposition of his inheritance was already known to him before he came over to the funeral, so that his bitterness can readily be understood.

The Bonapartists did not all accept the directions of the will without protest. Some of them were inclined to treat it rather cavalierly. There were "Jeromists"<sup>1</sup> in the party, and one Imperialist paper, *Le Pays*, now offered to recognise Prince Napoleon as the legitimate heir to the throne if only he would, without delay, renounce the Republic and promise liberty of teaching and respect for religion. The Prince, however, was not one to whom it came easy to stoop to conquer. So far from attempting to conciliate what we may call the High Imperialists, he took a speedy opportunity of offending them beyond their limit of forgiveness. When the Republic passed its decrees of March 29, 1880, against the religious congregations, he wrote a letter to the papers applauding the measure. This killed his chances, such as they were, of upsetting the directions of the Prince Imperial's will. In the whole of the Bonapartist Press he had not an adherent left, the leaders of the party ignored him completely, and the outside world was in danger of forgetting even that he was a Pretender.

At the beginning of 1883 Prince Napoleon thought that the time had come to assert

<sup>1</sup> Prince Napoleon, though Jérôme was not included among his baptismal names (Napoléon-Joseph-Charles-Paul), assumed it perhaps after the death of his elder brother in 1847, and appears sometimes as Jérôme-Napoléon, sometimes as simply Napoléon. His followers were called *Jérômistès*, to avoid confusion, while his son's were sometimes called *Victoriens*.

himself. The approaching death of Gambetta had aroused all parties to activity in the preceding December, and a Royalist manifesto was expected to appear as soon as the great man should pass away. But it was not the Comte de Chambord, it was the Prince Napoleon who seized the opportunity. On the day Gambetta died, December 31, the Prince sat down and wrote out a manifesto with his own hand. He sent it off to a printer, with an order for eighteen thousand placards to be prepared. So well was the secret kept that on January 15 no one had read the manifesto except the editor of the *Figaro*, to whom the Prince sent a copy that evening. In the morning Paris awoke to find its walls plastered with the Prince's words, while in the *Figaro* they were reprinted in full. As this paper was not a Bonapartist organ, many of its readers thought the manifesto a practical joke until they went out into the streets and saw the placards—or what remained of them, the police having been busily engaged in tearing them down everywhere. Even then there was no great disposition, outside Government circles, to take the matter seriously, and the Prince was merely considered to have stolen a march on the Comte de Chambord without doing himself any good.

The main parts of the celebrated manifesto are well worth reproduction:

"To My FELLOW-CITIZENS.—France is lan-

guishing. The great majority of the nation are restless. Without confidence in the present, they seem to be awaiting a future which they can obtain only by manly resolution. The executive power is enfeebled, incapable, and impotent. The Chamber is without guidance and without decision. . . . You were promised a Republic that should repair and reform—a lying promise. You are witnessing continual crises which strike at the head of the State, the Ministers, and the Chambers. Your experience of a Parliamentary Republic, carried on for twelve years, is complete. You have no Government.

“The evil lies in the Constitution, which places the country at the mercy of eight hundred Senators and Deputies. . . . The Army, the basis of our greatness and security, is given over to the arrogance of incompetent men. . . . The Civil Service is discredited. The functionaries are the slaves of the paltriest party interests. . . . Our finances are squandered. The taxes, heavy and ill-distributed, are imposed in a fatal spirit of routine, which is an obstacle to all progress. . . . Religion, attacked by a persecuting atheism, is without protection. And yet this great interest of every civilised society is more easy to safeguard than any other, by the loyal application of the Concordat.<sup>1</sup> . . . Our commerce is prejudiced by

<sup>1</sup> The Princess Mathilde, it may be stated, used to declare that in religion she was *concordataire*.

the abandonment of the treaties of 1860, to which we owe our prosperity. . . . Our foreign policy shows bad faith towards the weak. . . .

"Our poor France, once so great, has now neither friends nor prestige. Even from the kindest she meets with an indifference that is more painful than hostility; and yet it is needful that there should be a strong France in the world. We shall only regain our position by an internal recovery.

"Our situation is due to the abandonment of the principle of national sovereignty. So long as the people shall not have spoken, France will not recover. The heir of Napoleon I. and Napoleon III., I am the only living man whose name has commanded 7,300,000 suffrages. Since the death of the Emperor's son I have preserved silence on most questions of politics. Unwilling to disturb the experiment which was being made, I waited in sorrow until events obliged me to speak. My silence was but the patriotic expression of my respect for the country's peace. My conduct, my opinions, my feelings have been systematically calumniated. Impassible, I have only replied with contempt to those who have even tried to stir up the sons against the father. Odious and vain efforts! I have been obliged to impose restraint on their young hearts, shocked by these provocations. I wished to confront my adversaries alone. My sons are still strangers

to politics. The natural order of things places them after me, and they will remain faithful to the true Napoleonic tradition.

"Abdication has been spoken of. There will be none. When a man has more duties than rights, abdication is desertion. . . . The Napoleons, the elect servants of the people, cannot act thus. . . .

"I do not represent a party, but a cause and a principle. That cause is the cause of all, rather than of me individually. That principle is the right of the people to appoint its head. . . . Frenchmen, remember the words of Napoleon I.—'All that is done without the people is illegal!'"

The Bonapartists only took this manifesto seriously in so far as they denounced it bitterly; their Press was entirely against the Prince, and *Le Pays* in particular ridiculed his "eleventh-hour apology to religion." But the Government, under the premiership of M. Duclerc, took it very seriously indeed, and decided to arrest its author at once and put him on his trial. The police went to his house, 20, Avenue d'Antin. He was out driving, but, returning at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, was arrested and conveyed to the Conciergerie. Proceedings were instituted against him for "an attempt against the safety of the State with intent to change the existing form of government," and simultaneously a measure was introduced in the

Chamber of Deputies for the expulsion of Pretenders.

While matters stood thus, suddenly on January 22 the Empress Eugénie appeared in Paris from England. She took rooms at the Hôtel de Rhin—for a week, it was said—and had interviews there with the Princess Mathilde, Rouher, Mme. Macmahon, and the Grand Duke Constantine of Russia, then on a visit to Paris. Publicly it was supposed that the Empress had come to demonstrate her sympathy with Prince Napoleon, but her action was denounced as a blunder which would probably drive the panic-stricken Ministry to extend the expulsion order from the Prince to all members of former reigning families in France. However, on January 24, the Empress left again as suddenly as she had come. Whether authorised to do so or not, M. Paul de Cassagnac, in his paper *Le Pays*, gave an explanation that her visit was not to be taken as a mark of adhesion to the Prince's pretensions, but merely as an act of family feeling and chivalrous generosity.

Of the Princess Mathilde's views on her brother's exploit we do not hear. Since 1870, and especially since the death of the Prince Imperial, she had kept herself apart from all militant politics, though never abandoning the mild Napoleonic propaganda of her *salon*. She was certainly distressed now over the imprisonment. At a small dinner given by her on

January 31 to Popelin, Lavoix, and Edmond de Goncourt, she was pale, weary, and absent-minded. She spoke about the Conciergerie with a gesture of wiping its memory from out of her brain. "Prison!" she exclaimed. "Ah, how I hate to see it!"

But Prince Napoleon was not destined to remain in prison long. The Ministry, blamed by sober men for foolishly exaggerating the Prince's importance,<sup>1</sup> tottered and fell before the end of the month. M. Fallières consented to become Premier, but immediately was attacked by illness. His ministers carried the Expulsion Bill through the Chamber, but the Senate sent it back. On February 9 Prince Napoleon was released, the courts refusing to see him guilty of an attempt to overthrow the Government. M. Fallières resigned, a brief provisional Ministry sent the Bill again to the Senate, who rejected it by a small majority—amid roars of laughter which might have been expected at some home of farce—and then President Grévy sent for Jules Ferry, who succeeded in forming a Cabinet. In the meanwhile Prince Napoleon, on being set free, took his younger son Louis and crossed over to

<sup>1</sup> The Paris correspondent of the *Times* wrote with regard to this charge: "It is argued that it was wrong to make such a fuss, because it gives the Prince importance and popularity. This might be true with any other pretender, but with Prince Napoleon it is not to be feared. Whatever his adversaries may do, they will never make him popular."

England with him. On the following day a new paper came out, *L'Appel au Peuple*, which, unlike the rest of the Imperialist Press, was Jeromist. On its front page it republished the manifesto, and within it printed a telegram from the Prince to the Empress Eugénie, to the following effect :

“ I wish my first act of liberty to be that of repairing to your Majesty to offer you all my respects and thanks for the act of generous sympathy performed by you in coming to Paris.”

The apparent reconciliation between the warring elements in the Bonapartist party had but a brief life. Returning to Paris, Prince Napoleon in May 1884 had a violent quarrel with his son Victor, who left his house and set up for himself. Cassagnac was suspected of having fomented the quarrel, and from some mysterious source the younger man had recently received enough money to make him independent of his father. Prince Victor no longer offered any objection to taking up the headship of the party. We may reasonably suppose that the Princess Mathilde sympathised with her brother rather than her nephew Victor, since it was to the younger son, Louis, that she ultimately left her fortune. The breach between the two Pretenders, father and son, was never healed. They did not long continue to head rival camps in France, however, for two years

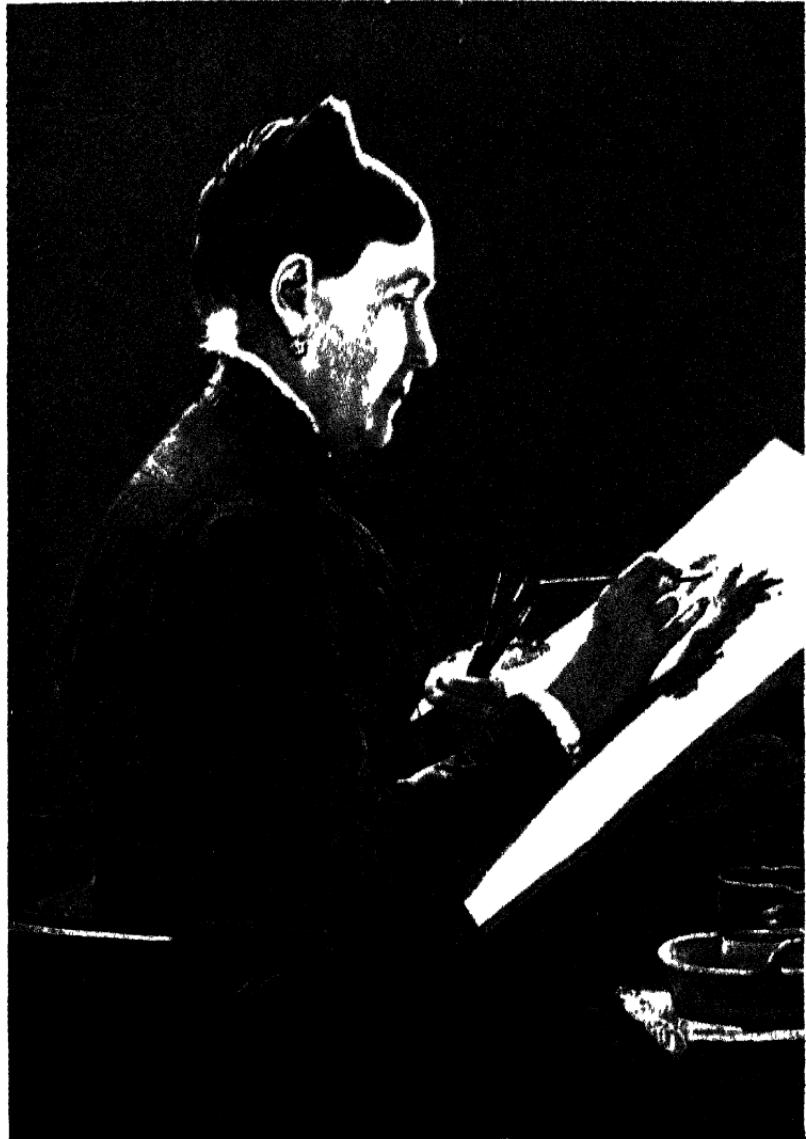
later an Expulsion Bill was at last passed through both Chamber and Senate, directed against the heads of former reigning families and their direct descendants; and the Princes Napoleon and Victor alike were conducted out of France. The danger which had been feared by Goncourt for "the poor Princess with her long love of Paris" never arose. Politicians were no longer so terror-stricken as to see any peril in the *salon* of the Rue de Berri.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE EVENING OF LIFE

IN the spring of 1885 there was a curious echo of the past, for the management of the Odéon decided to put on *Henriette Maréchal*. It will be remembered how, nearly twenty years before, in a hostile house, the Princess Mathilde had by her loyal applause of her friends' play spoilt her gloves and attracted the malicious attention of enemies of the Goncourts. Now the public reception of the play was very different from that at the Comédie Française in 1865. The delighted Princess pursued the surviving brother down to the green-room at the fall of the curtain, and there, in the midst of the actors and the friends whom she had brought in her train, called out to him : "It is superb, superb! Can we embrace here?" And embrace they did. To judge by his account, the ceremony threw Edmond into deep confusion.

It is fortunate for us that the writer did not hesitate to confide to paper such little human details, for through them we feel that we have before us the real Princess Mathilde, the woman



THE PRINCESS MATHILDE IN LATER LIFE.  
*(After Doucet.)*



as she lived. Goncourt took pride in his portraiture of her, and when he posted to her a copy, just issued, of the second volume which he had contributed to the *Journal*, told her of his pride. "Princess," he wrote, "I send you a volume in which your Highness is spoken of several times. I did not wish to construct in sugar the historical figure that you are and will be. I have tried to represent you with the combination of greatness and womanliness that is in you, and, too, with a touch of that Napoleonic language of yours. In fact I have tried to depict you as an historian should, who loves your personality and your memory, in the centuries to come. In any case, I believe I may assert that in none of your biographies, past, present, or future, will be found a more striking tribute to your heart and your brain."

Opinions may differ as to the completeness of the picture of the Princess Mathilde given in the *Journal*, but at least we must acquit the author of the charge of being a flatterer. He must have felt very sure of his ground when he put before her eyes some of his comments upon her and her circle. There is more than a touch of courage manifested when he tells, for instance, how Magnard, editor of the *Figaro*, writes to him a very complimentary letter offering him the art-editorship of the paper, and how, though he declines the post,

he reflects on the people whom its acceptance would have brought to his feet, on the respect which would have been his in the Rue de Berri.

In the early part of 1887 Taine published in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* his famous libels on Napoleon I. Both the Princess Mathilde and her brother accepted with alacrity the challenge which seemed thrown out to all Bonapartists. Prince Napoleon issued the book *Napoléon et ses Détracteurs*, which is an able and eloquent exposure of Taine's methods of writing history, and gains the reader's attention from the very start. It is dated from the Prince's villa at Prangins, and the preface closes with these words, whose effectiveness cannot be denied :

“ From the asylum in which I am writing these lines I look out on the mountains of that Savoie which I helped to secure for my country. Evil fortune makes men forgetful. I am now only a proscribed man, proscribed as I was in childhood, without ever having conspired against the peace and freedom of my country. I wish to make easier the exile to which I am condemned by reviving the past, whose glories are summed up in the name which I bear and whose vanished greatness should be to our patriotic spirit a strength and an encouragement. To defend the memory of Napoleon is still to serve France.”

The Princess's reply to Taine's libels, as we

have already heard, was much briefer and more personal than her brother's. Yet it probably cut the old writer far more deeply, for no literary man could afford to disregard the favour of *la bonne Princesse*.

Now begins a series of deaths which made great gaps in the circle of old. Early in 1891 the Princess Mathilde, in spite of her more than seventy years, made a journey to Rome—the last visit, as it turned out, that she was ever to pay to the Italy which she loved so well. At the beginning of the previous year Prince Napoleon had left Prangins, with his wife and his son Louis, and had come to live in Rome, taking a house near the old *palazzo* which had seen the death of *Madame Mère*. His health was by this time shattered, and he seems to have wished to die in Rome. He spent a little over a year here in great retirement, tended assiduously by the Princess Clothilde, but gradually failing more and more. At last a summons was sent to the Princess Mathilde, who came to find him on his death-bed. On March 17 this strange man, at once so attractive and so repulsive, passed away in the presence of his wife, his sister, and his two younger children, having refused to the end to be reconciled with his son Victor. In his will he left a request that his body should be buried either at the Invalides in Paris, or else on one of the Iles Sanguinaires

at the entrance of the Gulf of Ajaccio; but the Republic would not grant its permission, and so the burial was in the Italian royal vault near Turin.

The Prince's death put an end to the dispute as to the headship of the party. According to M. Loliée<sup>1</sup> it also rang down the curtain on the Bonapartist drama. But Prince Victor has not abated his claim in the slightest degree, and, forced as he has been to live in exile so many years, his position as Pretender to a throne has been accentuated by this very fact. On the birth of his little son Louis, at the beginning of the present year, the rejoicings in Bonapartist circles in Paris were great, and telegrams of congratulation poured upon him in his Brussels home in great number. Among them was one from the "Plébiscite Committee of the Department of the Seine," referring to the Prince as "the hope of the French democracy, gage of the national grandeur, inheritor of that mighty name which is an honour to the country." There is a ring of the old Prince Napoleon, Jerome's son, in these words.

The other son, Prince Louis, we shall meet again in connection with the will of his aunt, whose favourite nephew he was on the Bonaparte side. While living in Italy he had entered the army of his uncle King Humbert.

<sup>1</sup> *La Vie d'une Impératrice*, p. 394.



THE PRINCESS VICTOR NAPOLEON, WITH HER INFANT SON.

*Daily Mirror.*



From thence he had gone to Russia and into the Tsar's service, ultimately rising after his father's death to the rank of general. In consequence of the circulation of rumours that Prince Victor was likely to resign his claim to the Imperial throne in favour of Prince Louis, the former strongly denied any such intention in the Bonapartist Press some years ago.

Prince Napoleon's only daughter, Marie-Letizia, married the Duke of Aosta, her maternal uncle, who had for a brief while figured as King Amadeus of Spain. By him she was left a childless widow in 1890.

The year after the decease of her brother the Princess suffered two more losses—if one of them is to be looked upon as a loss when so long an interval had passed since the end of all friendship between the parties concerned. In January 1892 Count Nieuwerkerke died at his home near Lucca. Of the severity of the blow which succeeded this there can be no doubt. On May 17 Claudio Popelin was carried off by an affection of the lungs. He had been ailing for more than four years. Meeting him at Saint-Gratien in the summer of 1888, Goncourt had found him in a sad condition. His pallor was alarming, and he could only mount the stairs with difficulty. He protested humorously that the doctors provided him with a good comedy, some saying

that his heart was abnormal, others that his lungs were the only source of danger. He hoped that a rest at Arcachon would set him up again. He seemed for a time to improve in health, but he was beyond recovery. It was the Princess's companion, the Baroness Galbois, who first sent the news of his death to Goncourt.<sup>1</sup>

On November 20, 1895, the Princess, with her nephew Giuseppe Primoli, hurried over to Marly to see the dying Alexandre Dumas *filz*, who had brought his fate upon himself by going, when in an unfit condition, to see the unveiling of a statue to Emile Augier and coming back to wrap his head in cold-water bandages. This home doctoring was fatal, and the visitors found him in a very serious state. As the Princess entered the bedroom Dumas made an effort to pull himself together, and, with an allusion to Napoleon's visit to the Jaffa hospital, cried to her, "You come of a family that never feared the plague!" Of course there was here no infection to be avoided—but the Princess was seventy-five, and her visit was at least a proof of an exceedingly kind heart. She was very concerned at the patient's appearance, and said that she should

<sup>1</sup> In his *Femmes du Second Empire (Papiers intimes)*, M. Loliée states that Popelin left, in the preface to a book which was unfortunately not given to the world, a faithful picture of the evenings at Saint-Gratien and a striking portrait of Théophile Gautier at the Princess's (p. 114 n.).

send Dr. Dieulafoy to him. "And shall I be obliged to do whatever he tells me?" asked Dumas anxiously. If he did as he was told, it was not for long. At first he seemed to make good steps towards recovery; but on November 27 the Princess received a telegram to say that he was dead.

Commenting on the passing away of Henri Lavoix, one of the circle, Goncourt exclaimed sadly, "The old friends of the Princess must really cling to the stage." In 1896 he himself was obliged to leave it for ever, at the age of seventy-four. There is pathos in a story which he tells many years before. The Princess had the intention of leaving him by her will an album of seventy-five drawings done by Gavarni for *La Mode*. But one day in 1890 she came to lunch with him, bringing with her the album, which she put in his hands. "I am much too well," she said with one of her radiant smiles. "I should keep you waiting too long for this!" Longer, indeed, than he was permitted to wait!

Only a year before his death Goncourt had had the satisfaction of being nominated officer of the Legion of Honour—a satisfaction which must have been shared by his old friend, though she had no share in procuring the nomination for him. Twenty-eight years before the other brother had received the coveted red ribbon, through the Princess's aid. She had

telegraphed the news to the two of them on a holiday at Trouville, when it is sad to record that they found the distinction "incomplete," because only one had obtained it.

One by one the members of the famous *salon* fell away, and still the head of it remained, a wonderful example of vigour. "It seems as though by clinging to life," writes the younger Gautier, "she wished to show that she came of a race of bronze, and that in her family pride she desired to endure as witness to a mighty epoch which had already grown so fabulous that one might believe it a mere legend, did one not see in the flesh some one who was almost of it." She lived her life to the full, and, as she lived it, loved it. Walking once along a country road at Montmorency, near her ever-dear Saint-Gratien, one October day, the Princess confessed to this love. She had Edmond de Goncourt by the arm, and the sunshine of a fine day<sup>1</sup> combined with the company of a friend to make her feel happy. "It will be very hard for me to leave this," she cried. "I confess it, I find life good!"

To this love of life, no doubt, her marvellously strong constitution contributed much. In the memoirs of her friends we hear of her occasionally as *souffrante*. But that suffering appears

<sup>1</sup> She was readily influenced by the state of the weather. Once, in the midst of a series of bad March days, she exclaimed: "When one wakes in the mornings one feels that one has committed a crime!"

always mental, the result of anxiety over public affairs, disappointment at the failure to secure some favour for one of her circle, and the like. She took pride in her bodily health. Once, in August 1865, it is recorded, she had a slight affection of an eye, for which an operation was required. Prince Napoleon sent his own doctor to her at Saint-Gratien to examine her. The doctor complimented the Princess on her condition, whereon she replied briskly, "Oh, I've never been ill!" No better proof of her strength, however, is needed than the tremendous fight which she made, at the age of eighty-three, against the effects of a fractured thigh-bone. The same fate, it is to be noted, brought to an end the long life of *Madame Mère*. The Princess Mathilde seemed, indeed, to inherit the Ramolino vitality rather than the Bonaparte constitution. In her old age several observers discovered in her resemblances to the Corsican grandmother which had not been apparent in earlier days.

One of the ways in which she managed to preserve her good health was by always taking abundance of outdoor exercise, even when she was in Paris. Her love for Paris never failed. Speaking of her later life in it, Gautier *filz* says: "Of course it was no longer the Paris of her young days. She found the city of to-day too big, too extended, too changed, and too crowded with people who do not speak French."

Still, "nearly every day she had herself taken in her carriage to the neighbourhood of the Madeleine, got down in the Boulevard des Capucines, and, accompanied by her lady-in-waiting, or some one else whom she had brought with her, she trod with a quick and joyous step the adored asphalt. If she met a friend she would take his arm and lead him to the Rue de la Paix." Here she was at home; every jeweller, curiosity-dealer, milliner, every seller of attractive things was known to her. She would step into a shop and seat herself near the counter, resting her hand in its marvellous suède glove upon it. She was received everywhere with respectful familiarity, not with the obsequious attention paid to millionaires. Every one showed her the latest creations, certain of obtaining from her a word of praise or a judicious criticism.

In the Bois de Boulogne, it was said, she knew every one of the keepers, not merely those who dated from before the Empire's fall, but all the others too, and would halt to speak to them in a friendly way when her walk took her into the Bois.

As she adapted herself to the changed condition of Paris, so she adapted herself also to the changed state of politics under which she lived. For this we have been prepared by her conduct in appealing for permission to return in 1871. A story of her behaviour on a certain

occasion in 1894 is interesting for the light which it throws upon her attitude towards the Republic. There was in the February of this year some great ceremony at the Russian church in Paris, at which everybody in the social world was present. The Princess Mathilde was seated in the church behind the members of the diplomatic body. When the service was over, the Princess, seeing Madame Casimir-Perier, wife of the French President, making her way out, accompanied by the Baroness Freedericks, drew back to let her pass. Madame Casimir-Perier noticed her action and seemed somewhat embarrassed at it. But the Princess looked at her with an amiable smile and said, "Madame, it is for you to go first as wife of the head of the State. I am glad to have this opportunity of being presented to you." "No presentation is required," replied the other, "for no one could fail to know you." The Princess protested again her pleasure at the meeting and expressed her good wishes for the success of the President's work. The two ladies hereon shook hands cordially. "Princess," whispered one of her companions to her, "you have crossed the Rubicon!" "I did not wish to pass the bounds of politeness," returned the Princess quickly. "It was only my duty."

Only one political affair is said to have stirred the Princess Mathilde's feelings very deeply during the last years of her life—and that was

the great *Affaire*, the case of Dreyfus. Here she took a side with vehemence and could not repress herself. As might be imagined, her sympathies were entirely enlisted on behalf of the French Army. In the course of an argument at this time with some one who did not agree with her she cried excitedly, "I had an uncle who was a soldier!" The *Affaire* led to dissensions, temporarily, in the Rue de Berri, where usually all possessed of brains met without fear or favour. For a period some of the frequenters of her rooms thought it better to absent themselves, lest the expression of their views should give offence. But the Princess was grieved at their defection, which seemed to her quite unnecessary. She wrote letters to them, protesting the continuance of her affection, and signing herself still a faithful friend. When the bitterness of the dispute was past, she redoubled her kind attentions to those who had held aloof and showed no remembrance of the trouble except in her anxiety to wipe its memory away.<sup>1</sup>

Napoleon I., France, the Army, according to one critic, were the Princess Mathilde's idols, in descending scale. As to the order of the two first there can be no doubt; the third secured its place through its being bound up in her mind with the others. In such matters of sentiment people are not wont to discriminate.

<sup>1</sup> E. Lavisso, *Revue de Paris*, January 15, 1904.

The attacks on the French Army seemed to her in some way to assail the man who had won for it its greatest glories.

The Princess Caroline Murat relates that she wrote to her aunt in May 1902, asking if she remembered the past. "My dear Caroline," replied the old lady, on the eve of her eighty-second birthday, "I remember everything. I think often of everything. I steep myself in tears and souvenirs." The allusion appears to be to the affairs of the more immediate past. Amid her perplexities over the course of modern French politics her tendency is said to have been to go back in mind to the days remoter still<sup>1</sup>; to that epoch, which she could almost reach, of him but for whom, as she had been wont to tell members of her family occasionally, they might all have been selling oranges on the quays of Ajaccio.

<sup>1</sup> Baron Lombroso testifies to the prodigious memory for facts possessed by the Princess Mathilde. He was writing once of some very remote affair, which had happened, however, within her lifetime, and being unable to make sure of what he wanted he applied to the Princess. She at once answered—speedy replies to letters were her rule—and gave him the information he required from her own personal memory.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LAST SCENES

IN the summer of 1904 the Princess Mathilde went as usual to Saint-Gratien. It was the fifty-third year since she had first spent the hot months there, and the fiftieth since she had become the mistress of the château. In spite of her advanced age she seemed in excellent health, but now an accident befell her which is frequently the cause of death to the old. Crossing her room she caught her foot in the carpet and fell heavily to the ground. She not only sustained a severe shock, but also fractured the neck of the thigh-bone. The injury did not seem likely to prove fatal at first, and a fortnight after the fall her medical attendant allowed her to leave her bed to sit on the terrace outside her bedroom. The younger Gautier describes her lying back in an armchair, her feet upon a stool, her head and body enveloped in white laces and shawls, her face emaciated by her sufferings and the low diet upon which she had been put, and calling to his mind Antomarchi's death-mask of Napoleon I.

Yet she had this day a singular vivacity of glance, and her eyes, looking the larger for the falling away of her cheeks, wandered with a joy that was touchingly childlike over the familiar outlines of the landscape before them, bathed in the afternoon sun. "She smiled upon her dear Saint-Gratien and spoke softly of her happiness at seeing it again."

At the end of September it was decided that she should return to the Rue de Berri. She left Saint-Gratien, never to revisit it alive. On October 1 she took her last drive through the streets of Paris. She was in excellent spirits and appeared overjoyed to be back. Count Giuseppe Primoli was riding with her, and to him she talked gaily all the while. When, however, the carriage reached the Avenue de la Grande-Armée, she suddenly became silent and her face clouded over. A flood of memories had come upon her. The carriage passed on to the Place de l'Etoile. As it came abreast of the Arc de Triomphe the Princess gave a long glance and, with a graceful gesture, threw a kiss—a kiss of farewell.

A relapse followed the move. Dr. La Chapelle was called in, and the Princess was consigned to bed once more. Still she fought hard and was able to sit up in a chair occasionally. On December 2 she had herself carried in her chair to the window of her room. The sun was shining very brightly

and she turned with a happy smile to those with her, saying, "It is the sun of Austerlitz!" Such a sunshine ninety-nine years before had been greeted as Napoleon's light of victory.

But now paralysis had set in, and the end was only a matter of weeks. Her intelligence remained undimmed, and she showed a pathetic anxiety about what was going on in the world which she was leaving. "She had a feeling," writes Ernest Lavisse, "that many things which she loved were drifting away, she knew not to what future. She questioned all who came to see her about the course of events. A few days before her death, when I had called upon her, meaning only to pay my respects and then retire, she made me sit down, and in her feeble voice, which now one could hardly catch, she asked me, 'Well, what about public affairs?' I replied that they were not going very well, but in my experience as an old professor of history they never had done so, and that not going well seemed to me the characteristic of such affairs; that at all times they pleased some people and displeased others; that the discontented always talked of the coming end of the world, but the world was still here, and destined, it would seem, to be here long. This was my way of reassuring her, but I was never able to inspire her with my confidence."

On the morning of Saturday, January 2, the death-agony began. On the preceding night

she had not succeeded in getting any sleep until one o'clock, and at dawn she woke again and began to suffer terribly. La Chapelle was fetched and administered a strong injection of morphia, which failed to give any relief. Another doctor was called in, and preparations were at once made for the end. The Empress Eugénie had been summoned over to Paris already. The Princess Clothilde had arrived long before. The Princes Victor and Louis had both been informed; but Victor was still debarred from setting foot on French soil, and Louis was in the Caucasus when the call came to him. Count Luigi Primoli had returned from America to join his brother in attendance on their great-aunt. A number of devoted friends were waiting in the house.

When the doctors gave their decision the news was sent to the Abbé Jeannier, *curé* of Saint-Gratien, who was in readiness in Paris. The Abbé was a great favourite of the Princess in her later years, and when she came to the Rue de Berri in October, 1903, she begged him to continue the visits which he had been in the habit of making to her in the country. He now arrived with all speed to administer the Sacrament for the last time. At eleven in the morning the ceremony took place, in the presence of the Empress Eugénie, accompanied by the Princess de la Moskowa, the Princess Clothilde, the two Primolis, the Walewskis, Count Fleury,

François Coppée, Ernest Lavisse, Madame Espinasse and her daughter, Hébert, Madame de Hauterive (a daughter of Dumas), and a few others. The dying woman was perfectly conscious, and, indeed, in spite of her great feebleness, was now going on so well that the doctors thought she would live until midnight. It was therefore thought safe for the Empress Eugénie, who had been greatly fatigued by her hurried journey to Paris, to leave her at six-thirty and retire for some rest in her room at the Hôtel Continental.

Seven o'clock had scarcely struck, however, when the Princess Mathilde raised herself up in the bed, opened her lips as if to speak, fell back on her pillow, gave a sigh, and passed away.<sup>1</sup> In the room at the moment were the Princess Mathilde, the brothers Primoli, the Countess Ruspoli (who, with the elder Primoli, had lavished devoted attention upon the sufferer during the whole time of her illness), Baron Brunet, former *aide-de-camp* to Prince Napoleon, the Walewskis, M. and Madame Louis Ganderax, and Julie, the faithful waiting-woman of forty years' service, who sat weeping in a corner. The aged Empress arrived back only to find her cousin dead.

The Princess Clothilde gave immediate orders

<sup>1</sup> The Princess "fell asleep placidly without a groan," Luigi Primoli told Baron Lumbroso. "Her waxen face resembled extraordinarily that of *Madame Mère*."

for the door on the Rue de Berri to be closed, but the news spread rapidly over Paris, and hosts of callers began to arrive to inscribe their names in a book at the porch. Among the earliest to sign were the Duke of Bassano, Count Benedetti, the Duke of Chartres, Paul Demidoff, Prince of San Donato, the Duke and Duchess of Morny, and several members of the Rothschild family ; but the list soon grew to enormous proportions, a striking testimony to the respect felt for the dead woman in Paris.

On the afternoon of January 4 the body was transferred to a coffin, the Abbé Jeannier reciting the *De profundis*, in the presence of the Princess Clothilde and her daughter, now Dowager Duchess of Aosta, who had arrived from Turin too late for the death-bed, the Primolis, and many others, including the representatives of Princes Victor and Louis Napoleon and the Empress Eugénie, who was herself lying ill in bed at her hotel. The dead Princess was robed entirely in white, with a white pearl in either ear, according to her directions. In the coffin with her were put the statuette of the Virgin before which she was wont to make her prayers, a crucifix which she had had from early childhood, a portrait of Napoleon, and two flowers, a rose and a carnation, her favourite blooms.

On the following day the coffin was taken to Saint-Gratien, where the Princess had ordered

that she should be buried. The *chapelle-ardente* was prepared there, and thither were sent the tributes of flowers arriving in great numbers. Among the most notable of these were two eagles made of violets, bound together with black ribbon, inscribed: "Loëtitia and Louis-Napoleon"; a violet crown from Prince Victor; a wreath of roses and white lilac, bearing the inscription "W. II." from the Kaiser; another of violets, roses, and lilac from the Dowager Queen Maria Pia of Portugal; and, not least of all, a cross of Parma violets from the Asile Mathilde. All these were to be seen at a service in the church of Saint-Gratien on January 7, when the members of the family then in Paris were present with a number of specially invited friends. The whole façade of the church was covered with long black draperies edged with silver, and black-and-silver was the colour-scheme within. The three principal seats were reserved for the Empress Eugénie, the Princess Clothilde, and the Duchess of Aosta. On the following day a requiem Mass for the general public was celebrated at the church of Saint-Philippe du Roule.

The actual funeral awaited the arrival in Paris of Prince Louis. He had started from Tiflis as soon as the summons reached him, but by the Tsar's orders he had proceeded first to St. Petersburg to receive a message for the bereaved family. On his journey from Russia

he was met at Liège by his brother Victor. The proscribed Prince had the news of his aunt's death in Brussels on the evening of January 2, and had immediately telegraphed it to the sovereigns of Europe, who sent their condolences on the following day. He now accompanied Louis in the train as far as the French frontier, where he had perforce to turn back. Louis reached Paris on the 11th, meeting with a demonstration at the Gare du Nord, which, however, confined itself to shouts of "*Vive le Général Bonaparte!*"<sup>1</sup> He had not been an entire stranger to Paris since the expulsion of his father and brother, for we hear of him dining with his aunt in the Rue de Berri in 1895. Now he came with full leave from the Tsar to arrange his affairs, while the French Government offered him all facilities with regard to the funeral.

The only delay now was occasioned by the excavation of the grave in the transept at Saint-Gratien. The Princess had directed that she should be buried on the right of the transept, facing the tomb of Marshal Catinat, which she herself had restored. The consent of the Prince, as the universal legatee, was awaited before the work was commenced ; but naturally he had no objection to offer, and as soon as possible after

<sup>1</sup> He is described by an eye-witness on this occasion as a very striking figure, with his slight black moustache and imperial, his energetic features, his tall, slim figure and determined carriage.

his arrival in Paris a date was fixed and the final arrangements made.

The funeral took place on Monday, January 18. In accordance with the Princess's wish the ceremony was very simple. Only members of the family and a few persons of her intimate circle were invited to be present, though the villagers of Saint-Gratien assembled in front of the church during the ceremony and offered up their prayers. The service began at ten in the morning, under a heavy winter-sky. The bays of the choir had been draped with long black cloths barred with silver crosses, but otherwise the church was bare. The coffin was placed in the middle of the nave, covered with a silver-edged black pall, on which were placed a crucifix and three bunches of violets. Four tapers stood about it—and this was all. The Marquis de la Grange, representing Prince Victor, was the first to enter the church, followed by the Comte de Hauterive, of Prince Louis's suite, the Countess, the brothers Primoli, Baron Brunet, and the Duke of Feltre. Only forty people in all were assigned places, among whom may be noted, besides those just mentioned, the Count and Countess Benedetti and the Count and Countess Ramolino de Coll'Alto, whose kinship to the deceased is testified by their name—that of *Madame Mère*. Prince Louis arrived in a carriage with the Princess Clothilde at ten o'clock, and was received by

the Abbé Jeannier. The Empress Eugénie, who had been confined to her room again by a slight attack of influenza, dared not venture out in the unpropitious weather; while the Duchess of Aosta had been summoned to Turin, and could not return in time for the funeral.

The Low Mass being over, the Abbé retired to don a cope of black velvet embroidered with silver, and then returned to give the Absolution and pronounce the last prayers as the coffin was lowered into the grave prepared for it. The holy water was sprinkled first by the Abbé, then by the Prince Louis and the Princess Clothilde, then by the other mourners, and last of all by the sobbing Giuseppe Primoli. The space was covered over with the tomb-stone, and all was over in an hour.

By the Princess's will the bulk of her property went to Prince Louis Bonaparte. Her estate was valued at two million francs, apart from her jewellery, her family relics, and the objects of art which were not directed to be sold.<sup>1</sup> A special bequest was made to the Asile Mathilde, most of the jewellery was left

<sup>1</sup> "By the Princess's orders," wrote M. Masson in his introduction to the sale-catalogue (which he wrote at Prince Louis's request), "everything impersonal—if anything which she loved, looked upon, handled, touched, could escape the stamp of her personality for ever and not become part of her—everything which has not memories or family associations about it is to be put up for sale."

to the Duchess of Aosta, some also to the Princess Clothilde. Count Giuseppe Primoli had the Princess's papers. Certain valuable pictures were presented to the Louvre. The Napoleonic relics were divided between the Princes Victor and Louis. Some of these had been lent by the Princess to the Musée des Souverains, but had come back to her when the French Government decided to weed out that collection. Prince Victor, as the head of the family, received the bulk, but to Louis was given the pearl necklace which was Napoleon's wedding-present to Catherine of Westphalia. When the minor bequests had been satisfied, Prince Louis received roughly one hundred thousand pounds.

Lest it should be considered that the sum left behind her on her death was but small in comparison with the very large income which she had received under the Empire, and the more than comfortable allowance which had been hers ever since the separation from Anatole Demidoff, it is only necessary to remember the universal tributes of those competent to judge to her lavish generosity to every friend and every client. The point need not be laboured. The Princess Mathilde was one of those wise people who give in their lifetime rather than at their death.



PRINCE VICTOR NAPOLEON.

The present Bonapartist Claimant.

*Oricelly, Paris.*



## CHAPTER XXVI

### EPILOGUE

AMONG the very numerous notices of the Princess Mathilde which appeared in the French Press at the time of her death none is more valuable than that contributed by Ernest Lavisse to the *Revue de Paris* of January 15, 1904. One or two allusions to this have been made already in these pages, but the knowledge of his subject shown by the writer makes us not hesitate to quote more:

“The Princess Mathilde was the most natural person whom I have ever known. That she was by her nature the *grande dame* was declared by her appearance, her carriage, and her walk; by the frankness of her glance, the frankness of her laugh—how good a laugh it was!—and the freedom of her speech; by the nobility of a soul which abhorred vulgarity both in things and in persons, to such an extent that she could not repress a disdainful grimace when she came across them; and by the assurance which she had of the dignity of her birth. It was declared also by her simple and familiar ways. She

never marked the distance between herself and others by a single word, or gesture, or look.

"She was very modest. A painter, a musician, instructed by her reading and by the conversation of nearly all the men of the time who have anything to say, she was neither the woman-painter nor the woman-of-letters nor the woman-scholar. She detested flattery. She rejected compliments and never paid herself any. The Princess Mathilde had no vanity of any sort.

"Her good sense was vigorous and amusing. Subtleties, refinements, affectations annoyed her. One evening some men—great men, too—were discussing a few steps away from her the question of 'spirit or matter.' Sitting at her table, her spectacles before her eyes, her needle busy with her work, she listened without uttering a word. The philosophers proceeded to strange and paradoxical lengths. I was close to her, and she leant forward and whispered to me with a smile, 'How stupid they are!' This did not prevent her from admiring these same men, from enjoying to have them about her, or from showing them a friendship which seemed almost like gratitude."

M. Lavisson brings out a point to which we have not hitherto drawn attention. "The Princess," he says, "had a democratic soul, of the Napoleonic kind. She loved humble people, and took pleasure in talking with them

and finding out their good sense, their good temper, and their wit. She used to admire in them the French intelligence. ‘And there are fools,’ she would say, ‘who believe that we are decadent!’ She could only just tolerate society people who are society people and nothing else.”

Concerning the Princess’s faith, M. Lavisson says that she was “tolerant in religious matters, and had her own religion. She had kept up from her first childhood’s days the habit of making her prayers morning and evening before an image of the Virgin and a crucifix, which she directed should be put in her coffin; but at heart she was a philosopher of the old-fashioned type, hesitating before ‘the great perhaps,’ hoping that there may be another life, and a life without end, but without building too much upon this hope, if I may judge by a conversation which we had ten months ago, at the end of which she reproached me with knowing no more about the matter than any one else.”

One more quotation we must allow ourselves from this most interesting article: “She lived in perpetual remembrance of the Emperor,” we are told. “His memory was a regular cult. She set no such value on anything as she did on the relics which she possessed of Napoleon. All criticism which directly or indirectly touched or reflected on the Imperial person was painful to her, even if it came from a

respectful pen. ‘Why, oh why,’ she would ask, ‘is it necessary to say all these things?’”

Another of the obituary notices upon which we have already called is that which the younger Gautier contributed to the *Figaro*. Here again the writer draws the portrait so admirably that we cannot refrain from quoting a little more from him. The Princess, he says, possessed all the gifts of woman. “Need I speak of her beauty, of that line which the years could not spoil, and which kept its pure contours to the very end; of her free, quick step, of her victorious bearing-down upon her interlocutor,<sup>1</sup> especially if he should happen to contradict her? But her supreme characteristic was the desire to please, which is a very different thing from common-place coquetry. Out of this desire to please sprang all her qualities, and especially her constancy towards those whom she honoured with her friendship and confidence. Doubtless social relations were the cause of the presence in her rooms of hundreds of curious and ambitious people, of more or less notorious strangers; for such a smile and an amiable word sufficed, but she reserved her heart and *esprit* for her true friends. With what art, what

<sup>1</sup> We seem to see the Princess thus bearing down upon her adversary in the anecdote about La Guéronnière’s attempt to excuse to her his votes as senator. “Yes, yes,” she exclaimed, “you will vote for this and you will vote for that. In a word, you have thirty thousand reasons for your votes!” The salary of a senator, of course, explains the number of the reasons.

dexterity, what malice she made her intimates talk, Sainte-Beuve, Renan, Taine, Gustave Flaubert, Alexandre Dumas *fils*, Berthelot, Pasteur, Claude Bernard, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, not to mention her faithful Eugène Giraud, who had her permission to say anything, and God knows what this scoffing philosopher-artist could not say, with his husky voice, his Parisian accent, and his manner of the 1840 *atelier*. She interrupted them, contradicted them, set traps for them, for the amusement of seeing their more or less awkward struggles to extricate themselves when caught."

"The Princess's death," declares Gautier, "means more than an ordinary occasion for mourning; it is an historical event. Amid all the beautiful and noble things which are passing away, shattered by time or by the hands and the evil passions of men, we may say that the disappearance of the Princess Mathilde's *salon* tolls the knell for the end of a world."

What are we to deem such expressions as these? Do they convey a truth, or are they the mere exaggerations of grateful friendship, seeking vainly to repay over the grave a debt which death has made more visible? The very many quotations in this book will not have been excessive if they succeed in convincing the reader that the Princess Mathilde Bonaparte's fame rests upon a very broad and sound foundation. Among those who read it may

be some who, like the writer, received their first impressions of the Princess from hostile sources ; if not from the point of view of 1870, at least from that of the Tuileries in the fifties and sixties. According to the writers of this section of the Imperialist party, the Princess is among the *enfants terribles* of the family, a female counterpart of her brother. Flaunting her illicit connection—or connections, if we follow some who claim to speak authoritatively—and talking with extraordinary licence, the Princess Mathilde is held up as an awful example of the trials to which the rulers of Courts may be subjected within the bounds of their own kindred. Among later writers, many, especially in this country, have been content to accept this picture ; and for them it is as if Sainte-Beuve had never existed to draw his “Portrait of the Princess,” as if the Goncourts had never spoken of Saint-Gratien days or evenings in the Rues de Courcelles and de Berri, as if at her death, so recent as it is, the Press of Europe had not paid a remarkable tribute to a woman who, after all, never came down to the footlights and played to the gallery.

Perhaps the Princess Mathilde has to thank Horace de Viel-Castel more than any one else for the blackening to which her character has been subjected. The infamous *cahiers noirs* did their author’s work well, even in the expurgated edition which appeared of them in English.

Here was an old friend of the lady, it might be said, and even if he quarrelled with her in the end, how can we explain away his revelations long before the quarrel? The question of the trustworthiness of the Count's picture has been touched upon earlier in this book. We may decide that he held up a distorting mirror to the world with which he came in contact. But to discover how distorting was his glass involves much research among his contemporaries. In consequence, the Princess, like many others of his victims, has suffered gross wrongs.

There is, of course, a case against the Princess. It cannot be denied that she separated from a bad husband, refused resolutely to forgive him, took a lover, and lived with him, scarcely in concealment, for twenty years. It cannot be denied that she allowed very free discussion of scandal in her presence at times, and herself occasionally took a part in the discussion. Is there anything more to be added?

Some may say that this is quite enough. But we are dealing with a human being, not with an ideal character. Human beings require vices, if only to assure us of their humanity. To remove the genuine shades is an unwarrantable liberty. No more devastating maxim was ever held up to guide us than *De mortuis nil nisi bonum*. It strikes at the roots of truth; and, though truth as a concept finds little mercy at the hands of some fashionable philosophers, it

has still a very healthful influence in the sphere of the biographer. So let us leave the Princess Mathilde her vices. Her virtues are so glaring that they call for relief.

We do not propose to proceed to a catalogue of her virtues, which would involve a repetition of much that has been heard, in the foregoing chapters, through the medium of men and women who constantly met the Princess face to face and found her admirable and lovable. We will content ourselves with answering, if we can, one question—on the answer to which depends her claim to immortality. Did she have any effect on the generation<sup>1</sup> in which she lived?

The Princess started with the capital of youth, looks, rank, and money to conquer a place for herself in Paris. Other women have started with similar capital to do the same thing. Aspirations to be a leader of society are common and not particularly meritorious. But she aimed at a special section of society, which the ordinary great hostess regards in the light of an advertisement of her own tastes or a source of entertainment to her other guests. (It may be objected that the Princess once called the elder

<sup>1</sup> Or generations, as Gautier fils points out. She was a link between four in the world of letters. "Having known Chateaubriand, who only left upon her mind a very moderate impression, she was able to speak of him to three generations of his successors; to Théophile Gautier, for example, to Gustave Flaubert, and finally, to Guy de Maupassant and Paul Bourget."

Dumas a *pantin*, which argues that she, too, looked for an entertainer—but then Dumas was a *pantin*!) Still, if the Princess's ambitions led her in search for a *salon*, there were other *salons* partly contemporaneous with her in Paris. We have heard of the one presided over by that ambiguous person, La Païva, to the success of which Sainte-Beuve's praise and the Princess Mathilde's fiery denunciation alike bear testimony; it was not only "the truffles of the courtesan" which drew men of genius to the house of the former Thérèse Lachmann. There was also the Princess Julie Bonaparte, wife of the Marquis of Roccagiovine, who craved a place among the intellectuals. It is true that she made the extraordinary blunder of sending for Sainte-Beuve to read her notebook, in which she had forgotten the existence of some gross libels upon the old critic, bringing down upon her a very cutting letter of farewell from him when he returned the notebook. Still, as she numbered among her visitors Renan, Thiers, Flaubert, Dupin, Prince Napoleon, and other celebrities, she did not altogether fail in her efforts.

The Princess Mathilde, however, did far more than Madame de Païva or the Princess Julie. She drew the men of brains together in her rooms and there stamped upon them, so to say, her hall-mark. She did not necessarily "buy" them all, in Edmond de Goncourt's phrase, to

support the Empire. But the *Mathildiens* must at least be on speaking terms with the Empire. Thus in the Rue de Courcelles and at Saint-Gratien there was a force which made for the security of the Government. Furthermore, from the clash of intellects, meeting through the hostess's influence, sparks must have been produced which later burst into flame. And of the brilliance of the fiery souls who came together under her eyes it is assuredly unnecessary to speak.

To appreciate the value of the Princess's institution in the Rue de Courcelles, it is only necessary to think of that other Court, the real Court, where the highest society of the day amused itself so desperately. Probably the letter to Mme. Octave Feuillet from her husband at Compiègne, is well known, in which he tells how courtiers were compelled to walk in front of a lady, holding a candle, and say, as gravely as possible, "The King of Morocco is dead!" or to play at the *Toilette de Madame*, each one representing some article, while the Emperor ran from one to another, convulsed with laughter; or, at the suggestion of the Princess Metternich, the *singe à la mode*, to pick up a ring with the teeth from a plate of flour without befouling the face. And there is another story how, at Saint-Cloud, the nearly fifty-year old Count Tascher de la Pagerie was ordered to amuse the Princess Mathilde (!) by imitations of a turkey-

cock, a storm, etc., at the Empress's dictation. It would be unfair to describe these as the usual entertainments at Court, but they were not infrequent, while we have to search long there for "the rational pleasure" of which Goncourt declared the Princess's house the home. Not that frolic had been left out of the composition of the daughter of Jerome Bonaparte, the "*toujours loustic.*" But she preferred to laugh over the lightning caricatures of Eugène Giraud, somewhat broad in their treatment, it might be, rather than play hunt-the-slipper or listen to a middle-aged chamberlain imitating a turkey.

The Princess Mathilde did good work for her country and for her family; because, in spite of the faults in her career, which seemed to spring from the very vigour of her personality, she lifted up the reputation of both—of France as a land of the highest culture, of the Bonapartes as a stock which was not exhausted in the production of one great man. She did her work with an exquisite grace, which ran the risk of making the observer forget her high purpose in admiration of her generosity. She did not go without her reward, in her own lifetime. We will leave it to François Coppée to describe the reward and to utter the last compliment to the Princess Mathilde:

"Sorely stricken by fate, the Princess had the happiness of proving that she was loved for herself by all those men of merit whose

society she had sought. She had the certainty of their deep and sincere affection for her, and made sure that in them she had not courtiers, but friends. And let us hasten to say : to all of them, too, she was an admirable, a perfect friend. Not one stroke of good or ill fortune came upon any of her band of faithful without the Princess manifesting her joy or bestowing her consolation. Who among us, be he artist or writer, has not received on the morrow of a success the token of her ever-watchful sympathy? Even in her last years, in spite of her great age, did she not always come, with touching haste, to the bedside of a sick friend? Therefore we used to call her by one name only, that of 'The good Princess.' For nearly thirty years since the fall of the Second Empire the *salon* of the niece of Napoleon I. remained an abode of fascination and charm, such as we shall probably never see again."

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